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# Use and Abuse of the Internet: Parental Knowledge of Cyber Bullying in Middle School

Na' Lisa Rowe

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Use and Abuse of the Internet: Parental Knowledge of Cyber Bullying in Middle School

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### Abstract

The current literature has emphasized the impact of cyber bullying on the lives of children and adolescents. However there are gaps in the literature in terms of when and how, parents and school officials should intervene and prevent future occurrences. The purpose of this study was to provide a foundational basis for research associated with middle school children's use and abuse of the Internet, specifically online aggression and violence, termed as cyber bullying. Parental knowledge of student's Internet use and the prevalence of cyber bullying were investigated. Caregivers with students enrolled in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade in a suburban school of culturally diverse and varied socioeconomic status were studied. This research identified key elements to address the possible need for prevention strategies targeting students, parents and educators. Results demonstrated that parental perceptions of children's Internet experience and children's actual Internet use are in some cases shown to be different.

## Use and Abuse of the Internet: Parental Knowledge of Cyber Bullying in Middle School

The generation of the digital age has arrived, and children and adolescents at the turn of the century are being raised in an Internet connected world. Today's adolescents represent the first generation to have grown up in a society in which the Internet is an integral part of daily life (Berson, Berson, & Ferron, 2002). A communication revolution is shaping a generation, where face to face communication is being replaced by blogs, social networking, texting, and Instant Messaging as the dominate form of communication (Guerra, 2007).

Recent research has stated the Internet is now the most significant decentralized medium of communication in the world (King, Walpole, & Lamon, 2007) and there is an increasing public health concern in regards to our youth. Children and adolescents are spending more time connected online than ever before, one study explained over 97% of adolescents aged 12 -18 used the internet in 2005 (Wing, 2005). In a focus group conducted with Canadian children grades 4 through 11, researchers found that children and adolescents view the internet as an opportunity to explore the adult world unsupervised (Wing, 2005). The Internet can provide a growing environment that is both unmonitored and uncensored, concerning parents and educators that our children are being exposed to situations and content they may not encounter in their schools and communities (King, Walpole, & Lamon, 2007; Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

It has been noted that when social change occurs an opportunity is given to those who exhibit predatory behaviors a chance to strike, as new technologies develop that support the Internet those who cannot immediately adjust are at risk from those who can and will use technology as a criminal weapon (Butterfield & Broad, 2008). Cyber bullying has, in many instances, become that weapon. The current generation is growing up in a world, where by the time a child is eighteen years old, he or she will witness on television 200,000 acts of violence



including 40,000 murders (Huston, et al, 1992) and homicide, suicide, and trauma are the leading causes of death for children, adolescents and young adults, more prevalent than disease, cancer or congenital disorders (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001). It is no wonder then, that cyber bullying occurs, stemming as a side-effect of aggressive youth in a world of violence, perpetuated by technology and communication (Hawker, 2000).

*“With the keyboard as his weapon, the bully violated the sanctity of my home and murdered my child just as surely as if he had crawled through a broken window and choked the life from my son, with his bare hands. It was not a death that was quick and merciful. It was carried out with lies, rumors and calculated cruelty portioned out day by day.” Jeffrey Scott Johnston 12/21/89 – 6/29/05 (Bullycide.org)*

### Purpose of Study

The goal of this paper was to provide a foundational basis for research associated with middle school children’s use and abuse of the Internet, specifically online aggression and violence, termed as cyber bullying. The researcher has found that parental knowledge of this phenomenon seemed to be either very limited or nearly absent. Most research discussed the prevalence of cyber bullying; who and what a cyber bully was but left out parents. Are parents even aware of this new type of bullying, if not what should they know and how do they protect and educate their children? By analyzing survey data from parents, student factors were identified to inform youth and adults of variables that lead to abuse of the Internet and cyber bullying behavior. This study allowed for consideration of strategies and attention to be drawn to these areas so future research can build upon the framework in this study.

### Review of the Literature

Through a review of the current literature the researcher has discussed the contributing factors of cyber bullying, drawing connections between the rise of technological communications among youth, traditional bullying and the unmonitored world of the Internet. The author also presented research on the varying definitions of cyber bullying, along with methods in which cyber bullying is performed. Gender differences, socio-economic status, ethnicity and caregiver child relationships were discussed. The prevalence of cyber bullying as well as its effects on our youth has been analyzed, leading to a discussion of school responsibility and preventative programs. The researcher also maintained that parental knowledge of this new phenomenon is limited by the lack of respected research.

The occurrence of cyber bullying and online harassment is in many ways a reflection of how deeply the Internet has saturated young people's lives. A recent survey given by the 2008 Digital Future Report shows the rise of technology among our youth. The survey reported that nearly 80 % of Internet users age 17 and older consider the Internet to be an important source of information for them. This is up from 66% in 2006 and higher than television (68%), radio (63%), and newspapers (63%). Other statistics have declared that nearly 45 million children between the ages of 10 and 17 in the United States alone use the Internet at least once a day (Williams & Guerra, 2007). Research by Patchin and Hinduja (2006) presented that 90% of 12 to 17 year olds use a computer by age 10, the same study also found that children and adolescents are more likely to use the Internet than their caregivers. National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) echoed this sentiment in 2002, and explained that 90% of youth between the ages of 12-17 use computers and 20 million kids between the ages of 2-12

logged onto the Internet in July of 2002, while 11.5 million used Instant Messaging programs (Netratings, 2002).

Aftab (2006) took her research further and suggested children between the ages of 2 and 17 log onto the Internet at least once per month. More research by the Digital Future Project (2008) found that membership in online communities has more than doubled in only three years and more than half of online community members log on at least once a day. Close to 60% of teens have received an Instant Message or an email from a stranger and 50% report emailing or Instant Messaging with someone they have not met before (Lewis, 2001). The Digital Future Project reported that 56% of members reported meeting their online counterparts in person, a particularly disturbing number in regards to the safety of children and adolescents (2008). The survey also reported the number of hours people spend online per week continues to increase, rising to an average of 15.3 hours per week. Other research reports as high as 80% of adolescents own at least one form of media technology, including cell phones (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007).

This explosion of technology has many potential benefits including constant access to communication as well as access to a wealth of public knowledge. Children and adolescents have almost any information at their fingertips at any time. In a matter of seconds millions of questions can be answered through the Internet. Other benefits include providing adolescents who may have difficulty reaching out socially a less intimidating way to connect with peers. Socially awkward children who find it difficult to communicate face to face may find comfort in a more distanced approach to socializing. McKenna and Bargh (1998) suggested that social interaction on the Internet has unique characteristics including anonymity and control. Relationships online can be formed without the requirement of physical presence or closeness. An individual can choose when to log on and what information to share or to keep private, which

gives more control than is usual for a relationship happening in real time. It could be that the social interaction on the Internet, with anonymity, lack of need to reveal physical appearance, and the control of the information revealed in the interaction fulfills a need for people who experience difficulty in forming social contacts in face to face interactions (Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2000).

However, along with the benefits, new risks associated with new technology have begun to emerge (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007). The Digital Future Report (2008) found that participation in online communities, web sites for video posting and social networking is increasing and the majority of adults are uncomfortable with their children participating. Twenty five percent of adults polled suggested that their children spend too much time on the Internet (The Digital Future Report, 2008).

It is clear that children and adolescents in today's world are confident and insatiable patrons of electronic media, so it is no surprise those adolescents who set out to harass or bully others do so through the medium in which they are the most familiar. From a research standpoint much attention has been drawn to adult Internet predators, but much less research has been dedicated to detecting peer to peer victimization. This is contradictory to the research that declared the majority of time spent online for children and adolescents is spent communicating with peers (Hinduja & Patchin, 2006; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Strom & Strom, 2005; Willard, 2007b). However it also seems that for the majority, harassment, victimization, solicitation and bullying also comes from those peers (Soukup, 1999; Ybarra M. D.-W., 2007; Ybarra M. &., 2004; Hinduja & Patchin, 2006).

### Traditional Bullying

Despite the shortage of research related to cyber bullying and online harassment among youth, literature of offline or traditional bullying is excessive and may be used as a guide to study connections to online abuse.

Historically bullying has typically affected youth only while in school, and the specific impact of bullying on young people has been studied in great length (Kaltiala-Heino, 1999). It is not until recently however that access to the new technology discussed above has enabled adolescents to extend their reach of aggression and threats beyond the physical setting into a victim's homes (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). To better understand the concepts associated with online victimization we first must understand what defines bullying in the traditional sense.

Beginning in middle school children and adolescence play a much greater role in the formation of each other's identity than parents or teachers (Giordano, 2003). Adolescents begin to look towards their peers while exploring new identity formations. According to the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) our identities are linked to how we view or see ourselves as a group member. Adolescents begin to view themselves as part of the in group or the out group. Adolescents want to be accepted by others, and some young people have learned aggressive ways to meet their social goals and use bullying behaviors as a means to establish their desired social standard (Espelage, Holt & Henkel, 2003).

There are many definitions of what constitutes behavior as bullying; however the research seems to have these concepts in common among varying definitions. Most researchers agree that several conditions must be present for behavior to be considered bullying. These conditions distinguish bullying from friendly teasing and horseplay. The act of bullying is always unwanted, deliberate, and persistent and creates an imbalance of power between

perpetrator and victim, including aggressive acts and verbal threats made with a harmful intent. (Carney, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Nasnel et al., 2001; Shariff & Gouin, 2005; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007). Olweus (1999) breaks down the definition of bullying into three criteria that has included aggressive actions intended to harm, actions that are carried out repeatedly over time, and usually characterized by an imbalance of power.

Kowalski and Limber (2007) discussed the characteristics associated with the actual or perceived power difference between victim and bully. Characteristics such as popularity, physical strength, social status, extroversion, wit, confidence, intelligence, age, race, sex, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status can give the illusion of a power differential between adolescents. Middle school students can use the perception of status to manipulate others into fear or domination, whether the power differential actually exists or not.

#### *Characteristics of a Traditional Bully*

Bullies are usually characterized as hot headed, impulsive with dominant personalities and usually assert themselves using violence or force (Lyznicki, 2004; Olweus, 1993). Many bullies are physically larger than their peers, and have difficulty conforming to rules (Olweus, 1993; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Bullies are described as antisocial and have a positive attitude towards violence (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Research has also shown that some bullies who become violent do so because they are victims themselves or see violence at home (Kaltiala-Heino, 1999). Some researchers have even attributed some of these characteristics to psychiatric disorders that may contribute to the aggressive behaviors (Kaltiala-Heino, 1999). A study found that 30% of boys who were identified as bullies as children were diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder as adults (Sourander et al., 2007). It has been found that these students are also at

higher risk for school failure, drop out, drugs and alcohol and future legal problems involving violence (Janson, 2004).

Many students who are identified as bullies experience peer rejection and social isolation that contributes to a risk of depression and even suicide (Olweus, 1993). Lyznicki (2004) has also argued that often times these young people are unable to understand the emotional experience of others or express feelings of empathy or compassion.

Willard( 2007a, p.35) describes a “social climber bully.” These bullies do not fit the standard discription of a bully. These students are usually considered school leaders, jocks, and part of the “incrowd” that are usually admired by the school staff. However Willard suggested that the socially aggressive behavior can be subtle and those victims, who usually end up being part of the “wannabe crowd,” rarely report the incidents. Refering to the 1999 Colombine shootings in Colorado, Willard went on to acknowledge that Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were being bullied by social climber bullies.

When it comes to gender boys and girls become socialized to communicate in different ways at birth, communication constructs, socialize and brings about masculine and feminine stereotypes (Wouk, 1999). These stereotypes transcend family influences and are gained through peers, educators, and even the media. As stated above children spend over 40 hours per week connected to some sort of electronic media, so although parents may think they are equipping their children with a wide range of communication patters, influences come from many angles (Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 1999). In a study of males and females engaging in outside activities, boy’s games generally had defined rules, and required less discussion, while girls separated and chose to interact in pairs or small groups (Thorn & Lauia, 1986). While boys communicated by doing, girls usually communicated depending on role

negotiation and verbal interaction (Olweus, 2001). This seems to transcend into the ways boys and girls bully.

Boys traditionally bully at a higher rate than girls and both boys and girls are bullied more by boys (Willard, 2007; Olweus, 1993). However in recent years, research has found girls indirectly bully each other through relational aggression (Crick, 1995). While male bullies tend to aggress physically, female bullies tend to assume the role of leader in a core group of peers and become socially cruel and manipulative (Willard, 2007b). Female bullies attempt to exclude targets by backstabbing, rumor spreading, and rewarding others for their obedience in ostracizing their victim (Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

The following is an example of female bullying found on [bullycide.org](http://bullycide.org) a website run by mothers of bully victims who have taken their own lives.

It started slowly with rumors, secrets and exclusion; it progressed to harassment and violence. Like most victims of relational aggression, Corinne blamed herself for her bully's behavior. She internalized her pain and kept the bullying to herself in an attempt to maintain a relationship with her bullies, as many girls do. The bullying came to a head on October 6, 2004, one of the girls slapped her and called her a "whore." They said they wished she were dead and that she should "go home and kill herself" As a result, it damaged her self-esteem and caused severe depression, which ultimately led to Corinne taking her own life. -Corinne's mom, Rochelle Sides (Bullycide in America)

Traditional bullying can take many forms and has been categorized in many ways by various researchers. Pearce (1998) identified three different kinds of bullies: the aggressive one, the anxious one, and the passive one. The aggressive bully is aggressive towards everybody, not just the weak. The aggressive bullies are insensitive, domineering, lacking in self-control but



they are also high in self-esteem. Peirce argued that most bullies would fall into this category. He goes on to describe the anxious bully, who according to Peirce is more disturbed. They share more of the victim's characteristics, such as low self-esteem, insecurity and loneliness. They are emotionally unstable and provocative. These bullies are likely to be victims themselves, who many times are seeking retaliation. The third type of bully, according to Peirce, is the passive bully. A passive bully is one who engages in bullying in order to protect themselves and possibly to achieve higher status. A passive bully would be easily dominated, would be more sensitive to the sufferings of others but would do nothing about it and would also be reluctant to engage in active bullying.

Langevin (2000) classified bullies into four groups, these include, the physical bullies who according to him are the easiest to identify. They act out their anger in violent outburst either towards the victim or their property. The second is verbal bullies usually use words to hurt and humiliate their target, through name calling, insults or persistent and harsh teasing. The third type of bully, according to Langevin, is termed the relationship bully. These bullies act out by spreading hurtful or deceitful rumors about their target. This behavior is predominantly adopted by female bullies, and the last types of bullies are considered reactive victims. Langevin argued that these are victims of bullying who turn into bullies themselves.

Aside from the above classifications, other researchers noted that forms of bullying fall into five categories (Borg, 1998; Rigby, 1996). The physically aggressive; pushing, tripping, spitting, the social alienation; excluding, coercing other to reject or exclude a person, the verbal aggressive; name calling, taunting, and teasing, the intimidator; using threats, and coercing one to do what they would not ordinarily do, and lastly the relational bully; bullying that damages relationships; gossiping, spreading rumors, making racial slurs. It seems reasonable to believe

that most classifications of bullies and types of bullying behavior will overlap, so it may be difficult to classify a bully into just one particular type of category.

### *Prevelence of Traditonal Bullying*

Statistics vary when referring to traditional bullying among youth. Following the fatal shootings at Columbine High School in Littelton Colorado in 1999, where two young men who were known to be victims of bullies and constatantly ostracized shot and killed their classmates, bullying and school violence seemed to come to the forfront of media attention. As reported in Patchin and Hinduja (2006) of 41 incidents of school violence, 71 % of the attackers felt bullied, or persecuted by another student. Furthermore, a study of the relationship between bullying behavior as a young person and future criminality found that 40 % of identified bullies had three or more convictions by age 24 (Olweus, 1993). The American Psychological Association explained that bullies are more prone to other forms of antisocial behavior such as vandalism, fighting and shoplifting. The APA estimated that one in four boys who bully will have a criminal record by age 30.

In a study by Bosworth, Espelage and Simon (1999) of over 500 middle school students, in grades 6, 7 and 8 only 19% of students reported not engaging in at least one type of bullying behavior in the last 30 days. These results indicated that students do not fall into a category of either bully or non bully, it instead showed that bullying behaviors are common among the majority of students.

Other studies show that the frequency of traditional bullying associated with the occurance of verbal and sexual harassment is much higher than bullying alone (Ybarra, Espelage, Mitchell, 2007). Reportedly, victims of sexual harassment are as high as 83 % while

66 % of students have admitted to committing acts of sexual harassment (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007).

The discussion of traditional bullying is important and relevant to the application of cyber bullying. In many cases the majority of cyber bullying that is occurring stems from the previously discussed “social climber bully.” Using the Internet takes a certain amount of complexity and frequency to media access, and generally speaking “social climber bullies” are considered those from upper class families, with computer access, no history of violence with everything going for them (Kowalski, Limber & Agatston, 2008).

### Cyber Bullying Definitions

Traditional bullying has included overt physical acts and verbal abuse, as well as more subtle indirect actions such as social exclusion and rumor spreading. More recently however the increase in electronic communication has afforded children and adolescents a new means of bullying, from the physical to the virtual (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Defining the parameters of cyber bullying has proven somewhat complicated for researchers. For example what communication devices are involved, how they are used and to what effect, have made defining this new trend difficult (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008). Consequently not unlike traditional bullying, cyber bullying has many definitions.

Patchin and Hinduja (2006) simply declared that online bullying is bothering someone online or teasing them in a mean, hurtful way by calling names or intentionally leaving persons out of things, threatening someone or saying unwanted sexual things to someone. More inclusive definitions have stated that cyber bullying includes covert, psychological bullying conveyed through electronic means (Shariff & Gouin, 2005). Cyber bullying can also be defined as involving the use of information and communication technologies, including e-mail, text

messaging, Instant Messenger, personal websites, socail networking sites, and person polling to support deliberate, repeated hostile behavior that is intended to embarrass or harm others (Belsey, 2004; Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, Fightcrime.org, 2006; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007).

Other authors have distinguished between direct and non direct forms of cyber bullying. Willard (2007) argued that direct cyber bullying is repatedly sending offensive messages directly to a particular person and indirect cyber bullying refers to disseminating denigrating material or personal information to a wide audience other than the person intended to harm. Aftab(2006) proposed that indirect cyber bullying can also include using others to cyber bully, either with or without their knowledge or compliance. Willard (2007) also explained that this type of cyber bullying occurs most when a bully pretends to be someone else and spreads rumors or sends out hateful or inappropriate messages.

One of the most common element among the defintions researched was repitition. Patchin and Hinduja (2006) agreed that cyber bullies are those who construct malicious, violent, reoccurring power differentitals over and over again. One incidenent although potentially harmful, can not be equated to cyber- bullying.

#### *Online harassment*

According to Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston (2008) age may also play a role in the confusion that surrounds defining cyber bullying. Aftab (2006) argued that adult cyber-harassment or adult cyber-stalking is never called cyber bullying, however, cyber harassment among children and youth is often seen as a particular form of cyber bullying that usually involves repetative offensive messages sent to a target after that target has complained.

Types of cyber bullying referred to as harassment include, derogatory web pages in which information is posted or sent about a particular person or persons (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008). This has included sending altered photos of someone or online slam books created to make fun of other students, such as “juicy campus.com” where students blog about the biggest “sluts “ on campus or the most hated students. (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008; [www.juicycampus.com](http://www.juicycampus.com) ). This also includes denigration which encompasses harmful speech, spreading gossip or rumors and public posting or sending digital images that are meant to falsely represent the victims in an embarrassing or hurtful way (Willard, 2007a). Patchin and Hinduja (2006) also pointed out that denigration includes speech that under civil law may constitute defamation of character or invasion of privacy.

Kowalski et al. (2008) also discussed a relatively new concept of cyber bullying called happy slapping. Kowalski describes happy slapping as when someone walks up to an unsuspecting victim and slaps them in the face while another person records the incident, usually on a camera phone to later display online. Often times however the behavior does not stop at a mere slap and can escalate to a group assault on one individual (Willard, 2007b).

A recent incident in Florida is an example of this new type of harassment. Eight young girls were arrested after brutally beating a younger cheerleader on their team, videotaping it then posting it online. The victim's father said the girls wanted to create a video that would be popular on the video sharing site, YouTube. The victim had to be taken to the hospital with a concussion. The mother of one of the girls arrested claimed that the victim provoked the attack by threatening and insulting the girls on their MySpace pages. Seven of the teens will be tried as adults. The youngest of them is 14. The eighth person is 18 years old and considered an adult by state law. They face kidnapping and misdemeanor battery charges (Bond Set, 2008).

Kowalski et al (2008) presented other types of harassment that were also considered cyber bullying. Impersonation occurs when the perpetrator poses as the victim, most often gaining access to the victims accounts then communicating negative, cruel or inappropriate messages about the victim, their friend's or family members. Once the cyber bully gains the ability to impersonate the target, the speech could take the form of other cyber bullying, such as making threats under the assumed identity (Willard, 2007a).

Online harassment also includes outing or trickery (Kowalski et al, 2008). This is sharing others personal, usually embarrassing information to users online or tricking someone online into exposing their information to others. Outing is considered publically posting, sending or forwarding personal communications, or images that are potentially upsetting to the victim (Willard, 2007b). This type of harassment is common among failed relationships. The outing of sexual suggestive or explicit images crosses with cyber threats in which the perpetrator blackmails the victim (Willard, 2007a). Cyber stalking is also a form of harassment and is described as posting threats of violence, aggression, or sexually inappropriate comments online, Willard explained that direct cyber stalking almost always occurs in personal communication environments, indirect cyber stalking is described as repeated threats that are sent to others for the purpose of denigrating the target or placing the target in an unsafe situation (Willard, 2007b).

Exclusion or ostracism are also included in this category of cyber bullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Socially children will perceive themselves as either part of the "in" group or part of the "out" group, and social hierarchy online is no different. Online ostracism can occur when an Instant Message is ignored or a message is posted suggesting no one allow a certain person to be on their friends list (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008). The emotional impact of exclusion can be intense, exclusion can occur in an online gaming environment, group

blogging, or any other password protected communication environment (Willard, 2007a).

Particularly, Willard explained that exclusion in the context of Instant Messaging is blocking someone from the buddy list of a group of students is considered an ultimate form of rejection for a teen.

Cyber threats can also be included in online harassment (Kowalski et. al., 2008). Willard (2007b) explained that cyber threats can be direct threats or can be distressing material. Direct threats are statements of intent to hurt someone or describe a violent act, direct threats are usually about an actual event planned.

Willard also described distressing material as online material that provides clues that the person is considering violence of some form, whether to himself or someone else. Willard (2007, p. 12) illustrated this example of statements in a web page created by Eric Harris, one of the 1999 Columbine high school shooters. A mother of a student who saw the web page reported it to local police and an affidavit for a search warrant was granted, but according to Willard for unknown reasons the warrant was never executed;

- Bring a gun to school, ur on the front of every newspaper
- Didn't choose this life, but damn well chose to exit it
- I cant imagine going through life without killing a few people
- Nothing wrong with a lil killin
- All gods creatures do it in one form or another
- Yes people can be kissing my shotgun straight out of doom
- I tell it how it is
- If you don't like it u die
- If I dont like what u stand for, you die

- I choose who lives and who dies

This illustrates the imperativeness of discussing with children and adolescents the significance of reporting cyber threats to adults and the importance of being aware of the seriousness of posting messages online that may be perceived as threatening.

### Methods of Cyber bullying

It has become clear that when intimidation is compounded with humiliation and a means of exposure, it can lead to destructive messages, gossip and slander (Guerra, 2007). However some behaviors are more likely to occur in some settings rather than others (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008). The following is a discussion of how cyber bullying can occur through a variety of means.

#### *Instant Messenger*

Instant Messaging, allows users to carry on one or more real-time conversations simultaneously in text windows that pop up on a user's computer screen. Instant Messaging or AIM is becoming an crucial means of teen socialization with nearly three out of four online teens, or 13 million, adolescence maintaining a profile account, according to a study of kids ages 12 to 17 from the Pew Internet & American Life Project. Other research found that nearly 75% of youths 12 to 17 years old communicate through Instant Messaging (Burgess-Proctor et.al, 2008). The Pew Internet & American Life project (2001) reported teens use AIM to communicate with teachers about schoolwork, flirt, ask someone out and even break up. Many teens now give out their user name instead of their phone number to potential friends and dates. Teens use Instant Messenger from routine conversation to the emotionally charged, hard to say conversations. The authors of the 'Pew Report' suggested that there are no limits to the ways kids connect and bond over Instant Messages. 35% of teens who use AIM daily reported that it



is not just empty chatter and one in five consider AIM their primary form of keeping in touch with friends. AIM users value the instant connection to have difficult conversations; for example if someone's talking behind a teens back and they want to confront them, without the anxiety of actually being face to face (Thomas, 2001).

### *Electronic mail*

E-mail is the most frequently used means of communication among the Internet (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007). The reason that e-mail is an easy way for cyber bullies to target victims is that one e-mail can be sent to hundreds of people (Kowalski et al., 2008), so someone who wants to cyber bully can reach hundreds of other people in seconds. E-mail is also dangerous because it allows for pictures and files to be attached which could possibly contain objectionable information or altered photos (Willard, 2007a).

### *Text messaging*

The second method in which cyber bullying can occur is via text messaging, which one researcher referred to as the note passing of the new millennium (Carpenter, 2003). In the United States more than 150 million individuals, and 74 percent of Americas youth own a cell phone and nearly 100 million youth engage in text messaging (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

“Teens have created a new form of communication. We call it texting, but in essence it is a reflection of how teens want to communicate to match their lifestyles. It is about multitasking, speed, privacy and control (MarketingCharts.com)” According to MarketingCharts.com; four out of five teens (17 million) carry a wireless device, a 40% increase since 2004, and more than half of survey respondents (52%) agree that the cell phone has become a new form of entertainment. 80% say their cell phone provides a sense of security while on the go, confirming that the cell phone has become a mobile safety net (Carpenter, 2003).

Teens carry cell phones to have access to friends, family and current events. Text messaging allows for teenagers to communicate instantly to one another using their cell phones but without actually talking where it may be socially unacceptable or against the rules to speak (ex. in class or the movies). Studies show that texting is replacing talking among teens. Teens admitted spending nearly an equal amount of time talking as they do texting each month (MarketingCharts.com). The feature is so important to them that if texting were no longer an option 47% of teens say their social life would end or be worsened, especially among females (Carpenter, 2003). Teens have said texting has advantages over talking because it offers more options, including multitasking, speed, and the option to avoid verbal communication. 42% of teens even claimed they can text blindfolded (Marketing Charts.com; Roberts et.al., 1999; Troseth, 2008). Cyber bullies may use text messaging as a means of harassment by continuously sending offensive messages, which not only provide torment for the victim of the bullying but can also add a financial cost to the owner receiving the messages (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008).

Another trend with teens is to use their phones to videotape fights, access the Internet from the phone, and upload the fight to popular online video sites (Bond set, 2008) Teens will text one another with the fight's website to view. Any life moment can be caught on cell phone video and posted online without anyone's permission. Locker rooms, bathrooms, and other vulnerable moments can be instantly recorded and posted online for all to see (Mercury News.com, 2008).

### *Chat Rooms*

Chat rooms are another place people can go online to talk to others about a variety of issues. However chat rooms can also become a place for cyber bullying, members of the chat room can begin to talk badly or pick on another person in the chat, or they can exclude someone from chatting or ignore their comments or messages (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008). Furthermore those involved in chat rooms may assume a different identity and it becomes easy for people in a chat room to be deceived by others spreading information (Willard, 2007a).

### *Blogs*

Blogs, web logs or online journals are used to allow members to converse about a certain topic with many users able to communicate at once from a variety of locations (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008). Blogging by teenagers continues to grow, with 64% of online teenagers ages 12 to 17 engaging in at least one type of online posting, up from 57% of online teens in 2004 (Burgess-Proctor et al., 2007). These blogs can also be a place where cyber bullying can occur, adolescence may use these sources to talk about others, damage reputations, or spread rumors (Willard, 2007a). Kowalski et al. (2008) reported that blogs are a popular place for ditched boyfriend or girlfriend to post blog messages with mean, inappropriate or embarrassing information or pictures about each other.

*“My ex boyfriend and his friends leave disgusting comments in my guestbook at [an online diary hosting Web site]. Though I have locked my diary so that they no longer have access to it, they continue to leave hurtful comments in my guestbook. They have threatened bodily harm, and have even gone so far as to say that they would “kill me in my sleep.” They have also OPENLY admitted to being “obsessed” with me while taking an online survey. I feel disgusted (Burgess-Proctor, Hinduja & Patchin, 2008)*

### *Websites*

Websites are a place on the Internet with a home page usually devoted to a certain idea or topic (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Willard, 2007a). Websites however can also be a place where bullies and others set out to terrorize potential victims. According to Kowalski et al. (2008) websites can post offensive information including, pictures of another individual, and again the pictures may be altered to become derogatory or embarrassing. Websites can also be used as Internet polling sites (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008). Polling sites are used for the sole purpose of humiliating a target, for instance voting for the ugliest girl in class, or the fattest kid in school (Willard, 2007a).

### *Social Networking Sites*

Perhaps the newest and most popular way to cyber bully is on social networking sites. These sites include MySpace, Facebook, LiveJournal, Friendster, Nexopia and Xanga (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008). As of 2006 over 200 social networking sites existed and more are being added every day (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2006). Social networking sites are said to “provide a window into the culture of our youth (Kowalski, Limber, & Agatston, 2008 p.53)” These sites provide an opportunity for youth to create their own “profile page” for which the user can provide personal information about themselves as well as pictures, e-mail addresses and phone numbers. Willard (2007b) explained that social networking sites allow others to see in “real” time what the user is doing, through news feeds users see who is friends with who, who has begun or ended a relationship with who, anyone who has added new pictures, or even who is having a bad day.

Navigating these pages it would not take long to find evidence of cyber bullying among the profile pages of the users. Adolescents are able to use the page to display their likes and

dislikes as well as express their opinions with no filter; this kind of open forum with no supervision can lead to youth posting messages about peers they may not otherwise verbalize (Willard, 2007b).

### Uniqueness of Cyber Bullying

Youths that are harassed or intimidate in a school setting would traditionally be able to escape that victimization once school was over, however technology advances now provide bullies with the power to reach their victims personal safe haven, allowing no time for the victim to find relief and recharge again (Hinduja & Patchin 2007). The uniqueness of cyber bullying is that hundreds of perpetrators can become involved, even those classmates who would not otherwise engage in the bullying at school can hide behind their computers and inflict abuse (Willard, 2007b).

This type of intimidation is different than typical school yard bullying in a variety of ways, as explained by Strom & Strom (2005); bullies who aggress electronically can hide behind the mask of anonymity. The safety of being behind a computer screen allows people to forget traditional constraints of societal pressures, morality, conscience, and ethics. The anonymity of abusers is compounded with the fact that those abusers cannot see their targets emotional reaction has made this type of bullying a serious problem among today's youth (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Malicious words and statements that individuals may be ashamed or even embarrassed to say in personal interactions are no longer off limits in the virtual world (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). Abusers lack the face to face contact with those they are persecuting thus they may not realize the stress that is produced by their actions; therefore they are not likely to feel any sense of compassion, or sympathy towards their victims (Schneir, 2003).

Willard (2007b) claimed that the invisibility undermines the impact for the potential of consequences, or guilty feelings. Generally, when a young person participates in an action that harms another and receives feedback either from social disapproval or consequential feedback, the child will feel a sense of empathetic understanding. This feeling combined with learned values and expectations will lead the child to feelings of remorse and regret, however events that occur online will be less likely for detection thus the responsibility is taken off the child.

Willard (2007a) explained that young people tend to rely on external forces that influence responsible behavior; they have not yet fully developed an internal locus of control. This lack of tangible feedback of face to face interactions obstructs social cues that explain the impact of their actions on others (Kowalski, Limber & Agatston, 2008). This can also make it easier to rationalize an irresponsible or harmful action because it is not physically seen, it is not tangible. Willard declared that developmentally, children and younger teens are communicating with other peers online while they are still developing the cognitive perception and abilities that permit them to detect or predict how another may feel in response to their actions. Thus if developmentally children are not able to take the perspectives of others in face to face interactions, being sensitive to those perspective online can be even more difficult.

#### Current Research on Cyber Bullying

Relative to research on traditional bullying, cyber bullying is new field of research. Studies conducted have used a variety of methods to obtain information about cyber bullying. As a result there are some inconsistencies reported across studies. However the inconsistencies do not take away from the overwhelming agreement that cyber bullying is a rising problem that must be addressed, as shown in a study by Wolak and colleagues (2007) in which it was found

that from 2000 to 2005 there was a 50% increase of youths who were victims of online harassment.

A study by the National Children's Home in 2002 revealed that youths between the ages of 11 and 19 found that 16% of participants had been bullied by text messaging, 7% by Internet chat rooms, and 4% through e-mail. A follow up study in 2005 by the National Children's Home found that 20% of youth surveyed had been cyber bullied, while 73% knew the perpetrator only 28% told anyone about the incident. In the same study 11% of respondents admitted to cyber bullying someone else.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children also conducted a study in 2006. The results indicated that 1 out of 17 respondents reported being threatened or harassed via the Internet. 70% of the victims were under the age of 14, while perpetrators were 54% male, 63 percent were under the age of 18 and 72% of perpetrators were unknown to their target. The most common means of bullying occurred through Instant Messaging (33%) and chat rooms (32%) followed by e-mail (19%).

A telephone survey by fightcrime.org (2006) showed that 17% of children age 6 to 11 had been cyber bullied at least once in the past year. In a similar study, teens 12 to 18 indicated high prevalence rates. 37% claimed mean or embarrassing things were said about them online, mostly directed towards their appearance or involved their dating, or social life. 44% of the incidents occurred via Instant Messenger. Of those victims, 45% did not know who sent them the messages. Among the 26% who did tell someone, 72% told a friend, while only 35% talked to their parent or caregiver. Agatson et al. (2007) found similar statistics in a discussion group with middle and high school students. Students indicated that they were unlikely to report incidents of cyber bullying for fear that their Internet privileges would be taken away, they also did not

think adults in their lives would be able to help them when they were experiencing cyber bullying.

A similar study in 2004 of 1,566 students by I-Safe America, a nonprofit Internet safety group, revealed that nearly 60% of 4th- through 8th-graders have had mean or hurtful things said to them online. Nearly a third had been threatened.

Instant Messaging was also the most common medium used to cyber bully in Kowalski and Limber's 2006 study. Among 3,767 middle school children 6% had been bullied through electronic means in the last two months, 67% through instant messenger. 11% of respondents admitted to cyber bullying someone else at least once in the past two months. Of those who experienced cyber bullying at least once, 52% had been bullied most frequently by a known peer at their school. Similarly those who cyberbullied others admitted to harassing a student they knew through school.

Ybarra and Mitchell continued this research in 2004 by collecting data from over 1,500 young Internet users. Results showed that 19% of participants had been involved in online aggression, by making threats or harassing others online. 15% as online aggressors and four percents as victims. While only 31% of victims knew their harasser in person, 84% of perpetrators knew their victims. In a later study in 2006, Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak and Finkelhor replicated the study and found that 65% of victims felt worried or threatened from online harassment, while 32% of youths reported chronic harassment (more than three times in the last year). Demonstrating that the "cyber world" transcends many times into the "real world" Ybarra and colleagues found that 1 in 4 youths who reported being harassed online, also experienced aggressive offline encounters; harassing telephone calls, victims received things through the mail, harasser came to the youths home, and other face to face encounters.



Building on this research Patchin and Hinduja (2006) conducted an Internet based survey in which 29% of youth under the age of 18 reported being the victim of at least one incident of cyber bullying. Other research that agreed includes; Quing Li's 2006 study of junior high school students, 75 % of those involved in cyber bullying were white, while 57% were above average academic students. While gender comparisons showed 22% of males and 11% of females reported being cyberbullies, while 25% of males and 26% of females reported being the victims of cyberbullies. Burgess-Proctor, Patchin and Hinduja's (2008) study agreed, finding 78% of respondent victims and perpetrators were caucasian. While 47% of reporters had witnessed online bullying. Upon further investigation 60% of those who experienced cyber bullying, 40% were affected negatively at school. A 2005 study (Wolak, Mitchell & Finkelhor, 2007) found that 22% of youth surveyed had been physically bullied and 25% had been teased or emotionally bullied online within the past year.

A longitudinal study by McQuade in 2007 surveyed Internet behaviors of over 40, 000 students in grade k-12, in 14 school districts in Monroe county. The overview of findings showed that youth start using a computer and other media devices at very young age, and continues to increase with age. Children, as young as kindergartners, frequently come in contact with content that may be sexually oriented. 48% of kindergartners and first-graders reported viewing online content that made them feel uncomfortable. One-in-four students did not report the incident to a grown up. McQuade also found that the online activity of children is generally unsupervised and survey results indicate that cyber bullying begins as early as the second grade, peaks in middle school and sometimes continues through high school.

Results of McQuade's survey of middle school included over 9, 000, 4<sup>th</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. Reports indicated that 54% read or wrote e-mails, and 38% used Instant Messenger.

About 20% of students polled in grade 4 through 6 reported being victimized by one or more forms of online abuse in the past school year. 13% of students surveyed experienced cyber bullying. McQuade also found a 100% correlation between cyber bullies and cyber victims with regards to types of information posted online, and feelings about family, friends, computers and interactions online. 50% of cyber bullying victims reported that the Internet has caused them problems. Overall findings of cyber bullying also indicated that cyber bullies and victims are more likely to gain Internet access from a friend's house than their own home, while parent monitoring in this group of respondents tended to be none at all. 13% of students had their passwords used without their knowledge, while 11.5% were victims of impersonation online. 22.8% of the same respondents admitted to lying about their age online and McQuade stated that 75% of known victimizations go unreported.

In a summary of findings of 7<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup> grade respondents, McQuade found that 45% of students use social networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook. 1 in 4 students experienced some form of online victimization including 15.2% who had their passwords stolen. Another 15% were victims of online impersonation, 15.4% were embarrassed by someone while online, and 13.8% received some form of online sexual coercion. Of the students who experienced cyber bullying, 59.4% reported the person responsible was a friend or someone they knew. Of the 10,204 students surveyed 24% admitted to lying about their age while online, seven percent circumvented security measures and five percent cheated on homework.

#### Characteristics of a Cyber bully

According to the research there is much speculation of who cyber bullies, and we know very little about the characteristics of a cyber bully (Kowalski, 2008). We can assume that some of

the characteristics associated with a traditional bully are shared with a cyber bully but it is also likely that there are some important differences (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007).

### *Gender*

As discussed earlier gender differences occur in traditional bullying, noting that boys are more likely to engage in traditional bullying than girls. However when it comes to cyber bullying there is research that suggests a variation by gender (Burgess-Proctor et. al., 2008). It has been found that girls claim to be both perpetrators and victims more often than boys (Kowalski & Limber, 2008). In an earlier study Kowalski (2005) found that girls were victims of bullying 14% more often than boys and engaged in bullying behaviors more than boys. Adams (2001) acknowledged that previous cyber violence studies have reported that the majority of cyber victims are female, and declared that one out three girls were harassed online in 2001 alone. Furthermore Kowalski and Limber (2008) suggested that among traditional forms of bullying, girls engage in more indirect types of aggression, making the Internet a more popular means for female bullies.

Female bullies tend to assume the role of leader in a core group of peers and become socially cruel and manipulative (Willard, 2007b). Female bullies attempt to exclude targets by backstabbing, rumor spreading, and rewarding others for their compliance in ostracizing their victim (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). Interestingly Kowalski and Limber (2008) discussed how the definition of indirect bullying as used by females in traditional bullying roles is similar to many definitions of cyber bullying. Kowalski and Limber use a definition by Bjorkqvist, Lagersetz, and Oterman (1992) that describes indirect aggression as “a kind of social manipulation; the aggressor manipulates others to attack the victim, or, by other means, makes

use of the social structure in order to harm the target person, without being personally involved in the attack (p.52).”

These definitions seemed to have also described some ways in which cyber bullying occurs. It is no surprise then that females are more likely to commit acts of cyber bullying than males. Research seems to be concerned that “a significant number of adolescent girls are engaging in very risky activities online and continue potentially problematic practices offline as a result of these online interactions (Berson, Berson & Ferron, 2003 p. 63)”

The following is a painful description of one father’s grief after his daughter took her own life after years on online and school yard bullying;

“Our first indication of what had happened was found in Kristina’s suicide note, which was written in the form of a poem. She wrote: *"I knew I was always the ugly one. Don't say that's a lie because you don't know what some kids have said and done. It hurts to think about how mean some people could be. Even when I started to look a little better, they still couldn't see."* One blustery snowy morning in December 2005, we awoke to find that our 15 year old daughter, Kristina Calco, had abruptly ended her own life. Kristina had been approaching her 16th birthday with an excitement which was barely containable. Yet, for some reason unbeknownst to us at the time, this beautiful young girl who on the surface seemed to have just about everything going for her, felt the need to check out of life for good. We, like many parents in this tragic situation, were left to pick up the pieces. Fortunately for us, in addition to 2 suicide notes, Kristina left behind page after page of detailed journal entries, dozens of MYSPACE personal emails and numerous AOL Instant Messenger Conversation screen prints. We are now able to piece together a timeline for Kristina which begins with Bullying and Teasing from at least the

7th grade on. This is the story of Kristina Arielle Calco. Initially, we found 2 Instant Message Conversations in which Kristina said to a friend: *"You should have heard what they said to me in middle school. It was awful. I felt like crying. Everyday this boy would tell me I was ugly and nasty, and then he got other people to say it too. It was torture and a living hell."* In another IM conversation, she tells another person: *"Everyone I've ever liked has always rejected me for reasons of 'God, you are so ugly' or 'I'd never go out with you.'" When the other party questioned her about whether these words were actually spoken to her and what she did about it, Kristina replied "yes, they actually said those words to me and I cried a lot."* By this point, we began to question her group of friends, which included both her Middle school friends as well her High School friends. Yes, it was all true. We were told that Kristina was teased and tormented and ridiculed throughout her middle school years and up to at least the 9th grade. Neither she nor any of her friends ever told a single adult about what was going on. We were told that there was a particular group of boys that did this to her and that every day the girls would have to console Kristina in the cafeteria. Her friends would reassure Kristina that she was not ugly and that she was beautiful. They thought they were doing the right thing. Unfortunately, the bullying never ended. Kristina, who was such a frail and sensitive girl, was made to feel ugly on a daily basis by a group of her own peers. By the time she was in the 9th grade, she had internalized the verbal assaults until she believed them with every grain of her soul" (The Kristina Calco Story; as told by her father, <http://www.theshabbycastle.com/kristinacalco>).

One study focusing on female victimization found that 38% of female respondents reported positively to being bullied online (Burgess-Proctor, et al., 2008). The same study also

found that an even greater percentage of girls responded positively to being disrespected, ignored, threatened or harassed online. Burgess-Proctor et. al also found that the most frequent type of female victimization were; name calling, gossip, threats, being ignored, impersonation and exploitation of private or embarrassing information. This data also reported several instances of sexual harassment, behaviors that mostly involved unsolicited sexual advances. In addition Soukup (1999) found that 20% of females surveyed reported online sexual harassment in the form of electronic stalking and virtual rape, in which one woman described as a male user controlling two female players and forced them to engage in sexually degrading actions upon themselves.

Barak (2005) identifies three categories of sexual harassment that occurs online. The first is gender harassment; which includes verbal sexual messages, offensive nicknames, and unwanted pornographic material sent through online mail. The second is unwanted sexual attention referring to uninvited behaviors that explicitly communicate sexual desires or intentions towards an individual. Sexual coercion, Barak identifies as the third category of sexual harassment. This entails the use of various online means of pressuring the victims into sexual cooperation. Barak suggested that even though it is not forcible online, the threat can be perceived being as realistic as a face to face situations. According to Herring (1999) 25% of female Internet users ages 10-17 were exposed to unwanted sexual images and 19% of American teenage girls had experienced at least one sexual solicitation online in the past year.

### *Ethnicity*

“Gender and race are not only matters of representation and performance- what they look like or how they act- they are intimately linked to power structures in society. Patriarchy and white supremacy maintain a hierarchy that places certain people in power and oppresses others.

One need only to look at who profits from the Internet, who participates and who puts computer pieces together to expose the hierarchy of this power (Apple, 1990 p. 167)”

Throughout the research on cyber bullying one characteristic stands out more than any other. The majority of those who participate in cyber bullying are white; upper-middle class suburban kids (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006 ; Shariff & Gouin; Willard, 2007b;). In the majority of studies this researcher found victims as well as perpetrators were found to be Caucasian (Burgess –Proctor et al., 2008; Ybarra, Diener-West & Leaf, 2007) however research is limited in identifying and discussing this issue.

### *Developmental*

According to Aftab (2006), Wired Safety.org and the Teen Angels, pre-adolescents struggle socially, and online communities are vital. For these students, the need for friendship and to belong is greater than the risk of being bullied. During adolescence peer relationships increase in importance and peers play a critical role in social and emotional development (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Forming positive peer relationships are related to identity formation, a healthy self esteem and a sense of self worth (Hightower, 1990). Friendships can provide adolescents with a sense of belonging, while searching for autonomy and independence, secure peer relationships during adolescence have even been related to positive mental health at midlife (Hightower, 1990). However, emotional and social development can be disrupted when bullying or aggression from peers occur (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007).

According to Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) pre adolescents were significantly more likely to report distress because of their negative online experience, the authors attributed this to younger victims being more vulnerable because they had yet to develop the necessary coping skills. Developmentally children at this age are beginning to form identity of themselves based

on what they see in others. According to Hardy, Bukowski and Sippola (2002) adolescents begin to face challenges in forming and maintaining friendships as they enter middle school. Children are often presented with a more diverse variety of social groups and once in middle school new friendships begin to form. Often unlike elementary school adolescents begin to participate in specific social groups with select members, versus elementary school where friendship was usually based on proximity.

Adolescents in middle school begin to rely on their peer groups for feedback, in the form of direct and indirect communication. For example gossip, teasing, mocking, copying and ridicule show young teens if they are accepted or not. This information affects adolescents the way they view themselves in relation to others (Giordano, 2003) This is a crucial time in adolescent development and this is also where both traditional and Internet bullying is at its highest (McQuade, 2006).

### *Family Dynamics*

Family dynamics according to Williard (2007a) is the manner that family members treat each other. A family who uses bullying as a parental tool will teach a child that this type of aggressive behavior is typical in relationships. Families who use bullying behaviors are described as having characteristics such as; lack of warmth and involvement from parents, overly permissive parents, and harsh physical discipline.

In a study by Ybarra and Mitchell caregiver – child relationship showed a significant correlation to online harassment. The 2004 study showed that 44% of online harassers reported having a very poor emotional bond with their caregivers. 27% of harassers also reported more frequent incidents of discipline from caregivers, while infrequent caregiver monitoring was also related to an 84% increase in the odds of reporting Internet abuse behaviors. Overall the study



showed that youth with poor caregiver – child emotional bonds turned out to be twice as likely to participate in online harassment than those with strong emotional caregiver bonds.

#### *Frequency of Internet use*

It is not surprising that most literature has found that higher Internet usage is associated with increased odds of cyber bullying and online harassment (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). Youth who are online more often are more able to interact with each other and are given more opportunity to be aggressive online. Ybarra and Mitchell also found that 64% of online bullies used the Internet 4 or more days per week compared to 38% of non bullies. Thus one could conclude that increased time spent online correlates with increased cyber bullying behaviors, as well as opportunity to be victimized.

#### Effects of Cyber Bullying

Although cyber bullying occurs in a virtual world, in many instances the emotional and behavioral consequences of the incidents are very real for both the victims as well as the perpetrators.

We have defined cyber bullying as being when harm is done, an unfair match exists, and the actions are repeated over time. The repetitive exposures to bullying stressors seem to influence the overall development and severity of the individual's symptoms; the longer the bullying occurred over time, the more severe the symptoms became (Carney, 2008). Carney's 2008 study found that the length of exposure to bullying was the greatest predictor of trauma level. Trauma was defined by Carney as emotionally painful, distressful or shocking experiences that resulted in a lasting impact of the individual involved. Students who had higher trauma levels engaged in more forms of violence such as vandalism, robbery and even school shootings. This repetitive exposure to bullying behaviors can also disturb the victim's sense of trust in

themselves, others and the world (Janson, 2004). This distrust can leave a young person with feelings of powerlessness, helplessness and fear (Carney, 2008).

This outcome transcends into victims suffering in the cyber world. One startling statistic found that one in four victims targeted by online rumors reported carrying a weapon to school in the past 30 days (Ybarra, Diener-West, Leaf, 2007). The same study found that students who received rude or threatening text messages were significantly more likely to report feeling unsafe in school.

Those with depressive symptomatology are even more likely be effected by Internet harassment, 54% of students diagnosed with depressions felt more affected by the cyber bullying experiences as compared to 35% of young people without depression (Ybarra, 2004). Students with high levels of depressive symptomology, were also more likely to engage in close online relationships allowing them to become more vulnerable as victims, but also more inclined to be cyber bullies themselves (Wolak et., al. 2003). One study found that 42% of cyber bullied victims were frustrated, while 40% felt angry, and over one fourth felt very sad (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

A number of negative effects have been linked to cyber bullying. Suicidal ideations, depression, eating disorders and chronic illnesses have all been associated with exposure to bullying behaviors (US Office of Juvenile Justice, Delinquency Prevention, 2001). Victims may also become avoidant, experience nightmares, develop anxiety and even demonstrate emotional outbursts (Carney, 2008). Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) also report psychosocial challenges. 32% of those surveyed reported frequent substance abuse, delinquency associated with online harassers was also elevated from non harassers at 37%. This included property damage, violence and police contact.

A study done by Ybarra, Espelage and Mitchell in 2007 found that cyber bullying victims who experience more overt sexual harassment and unwanted sexual solicitation have a much higher risk of psychosocial problems. Internet harassment and unwanted sexual solicitation were found to be associated with higher levels of substance abuse, offline victimization, and perpetration of relational, physical and sexual aggression, delinquent peers, lower coping mechanisms and poor emotional bonds with caregivers.

Ybarra et al (2007) suggested that Internet harassment and bullying are related to school problems. The study found that victims of cyber bullying were found to have less developed relationships in schools as well as lower academic performance and other school problems, such as tardiness and truancy. The same study also found that 31% of victims felt that the incidents that occurred online negatively affected them in school.

The emerging knowledge that cyber bullying and other online harassment is related to school functioning supports the need for parents and school personnel to develop an intervention for youths identified as cyber bullies or online harassers, even if the bullying is not directly taking place on school grounds.

However despite the above reports of the negative effects of cyber bullying, youth and adolescent rarely report the victimization to adults (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Although the cyber bullying begins anonymously in the virtual world, it impacts the physical, learning environment. The fear that can come with unknown online bullies among peers and the bullying that can cross boundaries from school to home and back to school again can psychologically devastating for victims (Olweus, 2001).

Examples of more severe cases include a 12 year old Japanese girl who in June of 2003, killed her classmate because she was angry about messages that has been posted about her on the

Internet, in another example a Canadian teenager was a victims of a “hate David website” in which students were encouraged to post hurtful messages and degrading pictures. A recent story of young Florida boy who was relentlessly bullied and harassed both at school and via electronic means who committed suicide via hanging in his own bedroom, all demonstrated the seriousness of the repercussions of this new phenomena (Sabella, 2006).

Another recent example of how serious outcomes of cyber bullying is the story of a Missouri teen who killed herself after being bullied on MySpace by a former friend and her family. Megan Meier was a 13 year old Missouri teenager struggling with self-esteem problems and depression who befriended someone named Josh Evans on MySpace. Josh claimed to be a local 16-year-old boy who was being homeschooled in a local town. Megan was quickly charmed by his online messages but soon, his communication went from charming to vicious. In his last message to her, he wrote, “Everybody knows how you are. You are a bad person and everybody hates you. Have a shitty rest of your life. The world would be a better place without you.” Twenty minutes later, Megan was dead, having hanged herself in her closet. In a bizarre twist the family later found out that the identity of “Josh Evans” was created by a family who lived nearby. Megan had recently had a falling out with their daughter, so they decided to play a prank on Megan by creating the Josh Evans account (Carvin, 2007).

#### School Responsibility and Legality

Schools have been wrestling with solutions to decrease traditional bullying in their schools, and now even less known about how children and adolescence experience online bullying and harassment, parents are demanding interventions from school officials (Ybarra et. al., 2007). This continues to be a topic of great debate for school professionals who must grapple with how to efficiently interfere when they become aware of Internet harrassment among their

students. It is a challenge because the actual incident of online harassment often occurs off school grounds, but may begin and continue with traditional bullying behaviors in school (Guerra, 2007).

It is not generally against the law for virtual communication to mistreat or tease others because of first amendment rights; however at some point behavior that does cross the line can be considered harassment. Defining the difference between these is proving difficult for law enforcement as well as educators (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007). Willard (2007c) proposed that because cyber bullying involves online speech, the question of legal authority involves addressing the balance between student's rights of speech and student health and safety.

Ybarra, Diener-West and Leaf found in their 2007 study that more than 50% of cyber bullying victims knew the person who was bullying them online before the incident occurred. Furthermore, the majority of the known assailants attended the same school as the victims. Ybarra et. al. went on to suggest that online harassment and traditional bullying may overlap. The targets of online bullying are more often victims in face to face bullying. So it seems that there may be an offline component to bullying that occurs through electronic means. Therefore more research is necessary to help school bullying policies provide direction for anti cyber bullying programs. Although statutes relating to Internet issues are beginning to become visible, few legal cases are related to cyber bullying in relation to school responsibility, thus schools are receiving little direction (Shariff & Gouin, 2005).

In the landmark case of *Tinker V Des Moines Indep. Cmty. School District* (1969) student's free speech rights were revised in a school setting when the court declared that school officials could inhibit student speech if that speech would "substantially interfere with the work of the school or impinge upon the rights of other students." It can be argued then under this

decision school officials have the right to take action if speech that is occurring off campus, for example cyber bullying, is disruptive to the school environment.

Recently school districts across the country are beginning to react. School districts in Florida, South Carolina, Utah and Oregon are beginning to create new policies on cyber bullying (Chaker, 2007) and Virginia recently became the first state to make Internet safety courses mandatory in public schools (Labrack, 2008). Other states have followed suit as Washington State announced newly passed legislation requiring the inclusion of cyber bullying in the schools harassment prevention policies (Woodwary, 2007).

Kowlaski, Limber and Agatston (2008) discussed in what circumstances school districts can be held liable for failing to address cyber bullying. The authors maintained that school personnel have the duty to protect students and to ensure there is no interference with student's right to receive an education. A school district can become liable for failing to stop cyber bullying if personnel are found to have acted negligently. If the bullying occurs on or with school property it is the duty of the district to ensure the safety of the child, (Willard, 2006) however when students are off campus the issue becomes more complicated.

Shariff and Gouin (2005) acknowledged that educators, school counselors, administrators and policy makers would have no less a responsibility than parents, to adapt to a rapidly emerging technological society, to address emerging changes, and guide children to become productive, law-abiding citizen. Reports indicated that bullying research and numerous media reports confirm that "bullycide" (suicide by victims of bullying) is on the rise. Slowly the courts are beginning to recognize emotional and psychological harm as substantial, and significant enough to act on (Schneir, 2003).

### Preventative Programs

The increasing prevalence rate, the negative impact of electronic aggression on victims and the association this causes in school functioning suggests that there is an emerging public health concern in regards to our youth. However there is little research about how to address this problem. Worthen (2007) offered that media literacy be a suggestion as an approach to educate students about the affects of online aggression, however David-Ferdon and Feldmon (2007) noted, there is no specific prevention program designed to address electronic aggression, online harassment or cyber bullying. The research agrees with this author's goal in providing a foundational basis of knowledge of cyber bullying, describing the lack of educational programs and limited parent knowledge, so that more education can be developed for educators, parents and children and adolescence.

Prevention programs seem to be most common sense approach, instead of waiting for problems to emerge, education may be able to alleviate or even stop them from occurring (Worthen, 2007). These types of programs are also seen as more cost effective, both financially and emotionally. Worthen's 2007 study reported that the key implications for educators and policy makers are to take in account the effects of online harassment and cyber bullying on students. Worthen illustrates her first point by pointing out the negative effects Internet harassment has on victims classroom behavior. It is also important to be aware that Internet bullying peaks is middle school. Educators should be aware of the relationship of grade level to bullying incidents to target the best possible prevention programs. As previously identified Internet bullying can share common predictors with face to face bullying interactions.

Willard (2007c) suggests a prevention program be tailored to cyber bullying and Internet harassment. According to Willard the programs should start by including the following; conduct

a needs assessment to address the concerns, evaluate policies currently in place, implement more effective practices that include cyber bullying and Internet harassment, implement a cyber bullying intervention program that includes strategies for prevention, and finally engage in ongoing evaluations of the program's effectiveness.

Taking these implications into account Worthen (2007) recommends that educators must become more technologically aware of the popular ways students are communicating. This includes exploration of social networking sites as well as establishing open dialogue with students about their electronic communication.

In a discussion group of middle and high school students, Agatston, Kowalski and Limber (2007) found that, particularly females students found that cyber bullying was a problem in their lives, but was rarely discussed in school. Through this study the authors recommended educators to create prevention programs that included lesson plans to ensure that students understand what constitutes cyber bullying and the impacts that are associated with online bullying. Agatston et. al. suggested that classroom lessons should include what bystanders can do to report cyber bullying, as the majority of students in this study reported not knowing what to do with cyber bullying information.

In May of 2007 the fifth annual Wired Safety.org conference, 13- to 18-year-old volunteers were trained by the FBI, local law enforcement and other experts in all aspects of online safety, privacy and security. The program was founded by Parry Aftab, through Teen Angels.org that runs programs educating younger kids, teachers and parents about responsible Internet use. The teen panelists and their guests discussed the dangers of music piracy, hacking, sexual predators and, cyber bullying, what it is and how in some cases it can lead to felony charges. This conference is a leading example of the education that is needed for communities.



### Parental Knowledge

For the first time children are more comfortable, knowledgeable, and literate than their parents about the innovation central to society (Tapscott, 1998). One author noted that parents initially viewed the Internet as a helpful tool for homework, and cell phones as a means to connect in an emergency. Children and adolescents have a different perspective, and view the Internet and cell phones as critical tools to their social lives. For many parents new communication devices are foreign to them and some even admit that their children are the ones who taught them what they know about the Internet (Kowalski and Limber, 2008).

Identifying how much parent's understand about their children's online activities has been difficult because research in the area is so limited. The researcher could not find any studies specifically dedicated to parent knowledge of cyber bullying, however the few studies that were reviewed emphasized that parents are out of touch with what their children are engaging in while online.

One survey demonstrated a disconnect between what teens say about their parent involvement and what parents say; The Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 62 percent of parents indicated they check what their teens are doing online, but only 33 percent of teens said that their parents monitor their Internet actions. These results may suggest that parents of youths engaged in cyber bullying and other Internet abuse are failing to provide adequate supervision and limits for their children. The results of a another survey, commissioned by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) and Cox Communications (2006) showed that nearly half of parents surveyed do not have or do not know about monitoring software or their kids' online activities. They don't check email content, buddy lists, chatrooms or

Instant Messages. Fifty-seven percent of parents are unfamiliar with common chat lingo like BRB (be right back) or LOL (laughing out loud).

### Summary

Technological communication will inevitably continue to grow, however along with the greatness of advancement also comes the responsibility of society to keep our communities safe. Cyber bullying and other cyber crimes are proving that precautions are not being met. Previous research on cyber bullying has shown the seriousness of potential repercussions. Through an evaluation of the research parental knowledge of these facts are limited, as well as school responsibility and prevention programs. It is clear that more research is necessary.

### Rationale of the Present Study

The nature of bullying and its metamorphosis to the cyber world along with the negative repercussions affects both the victims and the bullies themselves (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Hinuju & Patchin (2007) have stated that the negative experience from cyber bullying “not only undermines a youths freedom to use and explore valuable online resources but also can result in several functional and physical ramifications p.2” The researcher has provided a review of the existing literature that outlines the prevalence and the affects cyber bullying has on both its victims as well as its perpatrators. As previous research has stated the prevalence of this new phenomena is just beginning to be explored. Other aspects including, parental knowledge of cyber bullying has yet to be discovered. The present study examines what parents know about this type of bullying, as well as middle school children’s use and abuse of the Internet as a whole. As previously stated researchers and scholars must be able to outline cyber bullying as a relevant issue for parental concern and then assess what parents know, as well as what they

should know about the issue. The present study begins to divulge into parental involvement and concern of children, and the dangers of the Internet.

## Method

### *Setting*

This project took place in the middle school of an urban/suburban district in western New York. Total enrollment for the district in the 2008-2009 school year was approximately 3,215 students across 6 schools. The middle school houses approximately 730 students in grade 6 through 8. Ethnicity is broken down in the district as 73% Caucasian, 15% African American, 9% Hispanic and 2% Asian. The district encompasses a wide range of families with varying socio economic status; 40% of the student population receives free or reduced lunch and the student poverty rate is approximately 12%.

### *Participants*

This project included all parents or guardians who had a child in the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade in the 2008-2009 school year. All caregivers with children attending the middle school and receiving interim reports were given equal opportunity to participate in the study. A total of 760 parent surveys with consent to participate were sent out with student progress reports via the US mail.

Table 1

Gender	Response Percent	Response Count
Male	51.0%	50
Female	49.0%	48
Grade Level	Response Percent	Response Count
6th grade	43.9%	43
7th grade	26.5%	26
8th grade	29.6%	29

Of the 760 surveys sent out 98 surveys were returned, an overall response rate of approximately 13%. 51% of parent respondents indicated that their child was male (n = 50) while 49 % of parents surveyed labeled their middle school child as female (n = 48). 43.9 % were parents or caregivers of 6<sup>th</sup> graders (n = 43), 26.5 % indicated having a child in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade (n = 26) and 29.6 % percent of respondents were 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents (n = 29).

### *Materials*

All parents or guardians with students who attended the district in the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade were given the opportunity to fill out a survey and letter of informed consent prepared by the researcher (appendix A). Since there is no survey that has been normed for parental knowledge of cyber bullying, with no consistent validity or reliability, a survey was created by the researcher. The survey was based on research that concentrated on cyber bullying among children and adolescents, including the student cyber bullying survey by McQuade (2008).

The survey consisted of 20 multiple choice questions, two of which allowed for specification, with the last question being qualitative (appendix B). The survey questions were designed to acquire information about what parents perceptions were of their children's online activities. After basic demographic information was established the researcher asked questions to better understand the extent to which middle school children had access to the Internet, and where and how much time they spent online, according to parents. Questions then specifically addressed the role of the parent or caregiver in their child's Internet experience; for example how much time they spent monitoring their child's online activities and how familiar they were with popular social networking sites. Questions went on to determine what knowledge parent's had about their children having profile accounts on networking sites and cyber bullying experiences.

### *Procedure*

Each parent or guardian who received an interim report for their child in the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade also received a consent letter and survey via the US mail. Instructions for survey return were printed on the consent letter. Students or parents / guardians returned completed surveys to a labeled box at the front entrance of the school. Completed surveys were picked up daily by the researcher and stored in a confidential folder, locked in the researcher's office.

### Results

The participants of this study were asked a series of questions based on knowledge of their children's Internet use. Initial questions were designed to discover what type and how much access to the Internet children had. 91.6 % of respondents indicated that their children had access to the Internet in their home. Only 15.5 % of parents said their children had computers with Internet access in their bedrooms, while 89.7 % surveyed reported that their children spend the most time on the Internet at home, followed by 11.3 % that agreed their child spends more time on the Internet at school. 56 % of parents stated that their child accesses the Internet at least once a day, while 36.7% reported their children going on the web at least once a week.

Survey questions uncovered what role parents played in their children Internet access. When parents were asked if they set time limits on their children's Internet use 36.7% responded no. The researcher went on to ask how closely parents would say they monitored their children's Internet activity and 33.1% responded sometimes while 41.2 % responded almost all of the time. Only 19.6 % of parents claimed to monitor their child's Internet activities all of the time, and 2.1% of parents said they do not monitor at all. Parents were asked what activities they thought their children engage in while online, and 70 % reported their child plays games while online, while 48 % and 49 % of parents believe their children view websites for kids, or download music.

The researcher also included questions related to parent's knowledge of popular social networking sites. When asked about the popular communication site AIM, or Instant Messenger, 87.6% of parents indicated that they were familiar with the site. Fewer parents were familiar with the similar site Facebook (63.3%), while parents were the most familiar with the social networking site, MySpace (88.7%). Upon discussing their child's use of these sites most parents believed their children did not have profile accounts. 69 % did not believe their children had a MySpace account, and 81.4 % agreed that their children did not have an account on Facebook. However when asked about their children's membership to AIM, or Instant Messenger 46 % of parents revealed that their children have profile accounts, and 11.2 % of parents have their children passwords. Of the 27 % of parents who claimed their children did have profile accounts on MySpace, only 10% knew the passwords to their children's accounts.

The author also asked parents if they knew of their children's experience with cyber bullying. 81.4% of parents claimed their child had never been a victim of cyber bullying, while 6% answered yes and 12% did not know. In response to the question; has your child ever cyber bullied someone else? Over 83% of parents responded no, only 1% of parents said yes and 15.3% did not know.

Parents also answered survey questions based on the knowledge of safety strategies that could be used with their children's online activities. 51.6% of respondents indicated that they were very aware of safety strategies and 30.9% indicated they use what strategies they know. While 41% of parents were at least somewhat aware of safety strategies, 7.2% admitted they were not at all aware of strategies used to protect their children online.

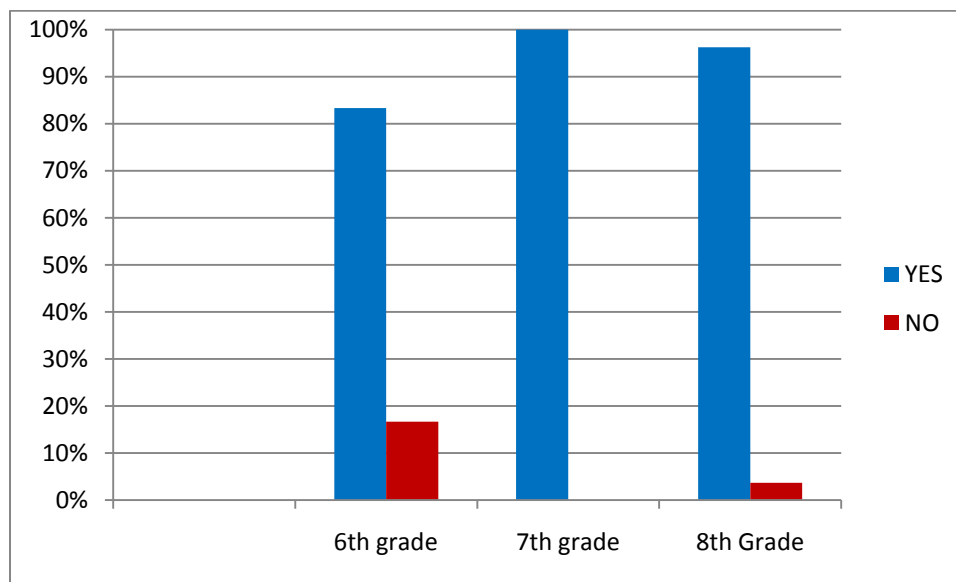
When the researcher asked parents to give their perspective of the effectiveness of an educational program on Internet safety; including Internet security, Internet rules and cyber

bullying, parents indicated that the program would be more effective for them than for their middle school child. 69% percent of caregivers declared that an educational program would be very effective for their children, while 75 % percent of parents agreed that an educational program would be very effective for them.

### *Grade level comparisons*

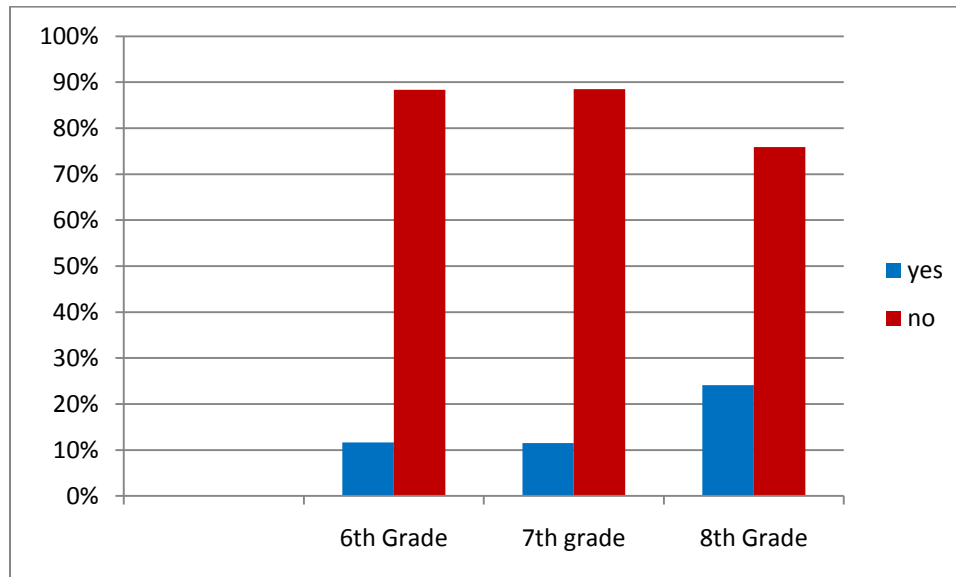
The researcher also compared results by grade level for each question completed on the survey, significant results are shown.

Figure 1. Percentage of students with Internet access in their homes



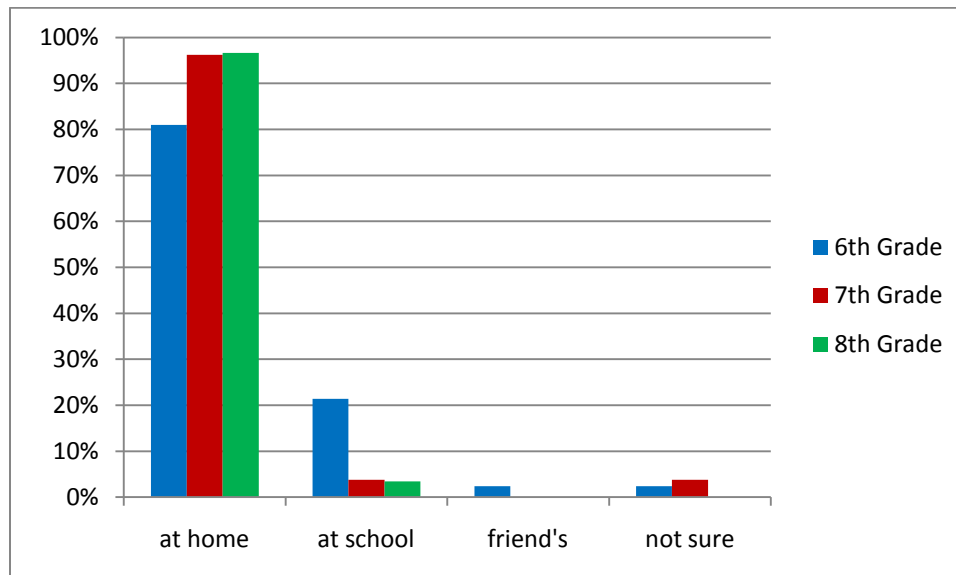
The majority of 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents reported having a computer with access to the Internet in their homes; 100 % of 7<sup>th</sup> grade parents, 96 % of 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents followed by 83 % of 6<sup>th</sup> grade parents.

Figure 2. Percentage of students with Internet access in their bedrooms



Most parents surveyed reported not allowing a computer with Internet access in their children's bedrooms. However results showed that 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents (24 %) were more likely to have a computer in their child's bedroom than 6<sup>th</sup> (11.6 %) or 7th grade parents (11.5 %).

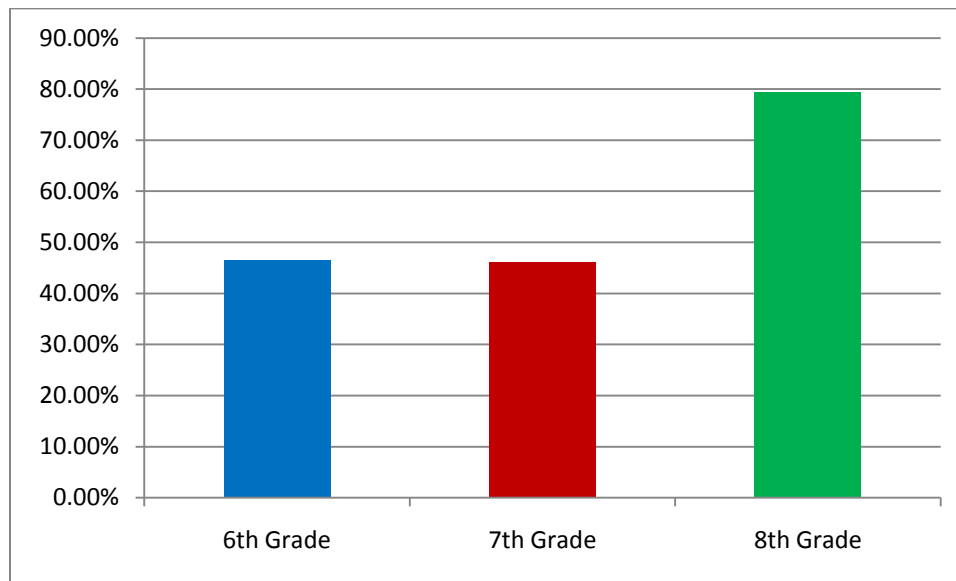
Figure 3. Parent's perception of their children's Internet access





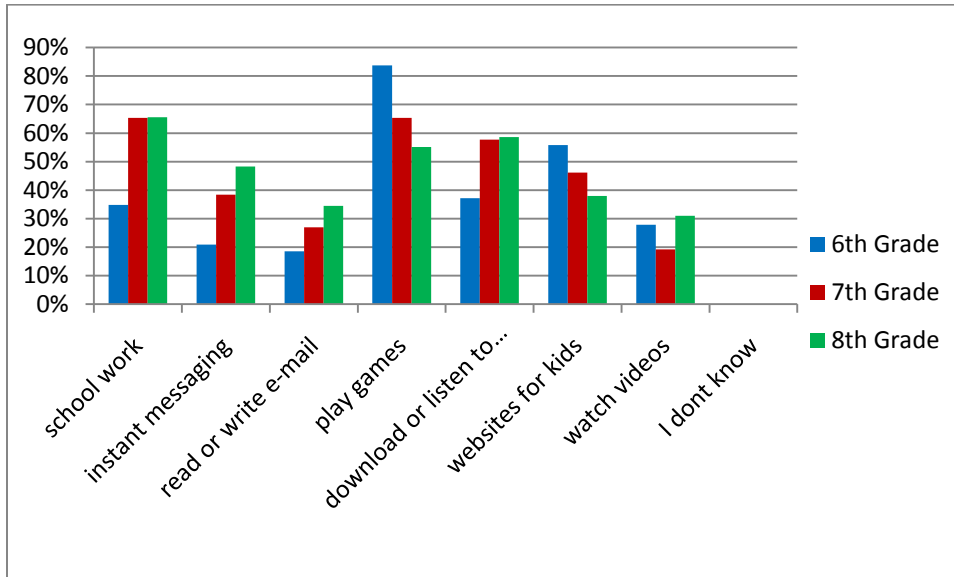
Most parents agreed that their children had the most access to the Internet in their home, however 6<sup>th</sup> grade parents seemed to believe that their children had access to the Internet at school more than 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents.

Figure 4. Percentage of students who use the Internet daily



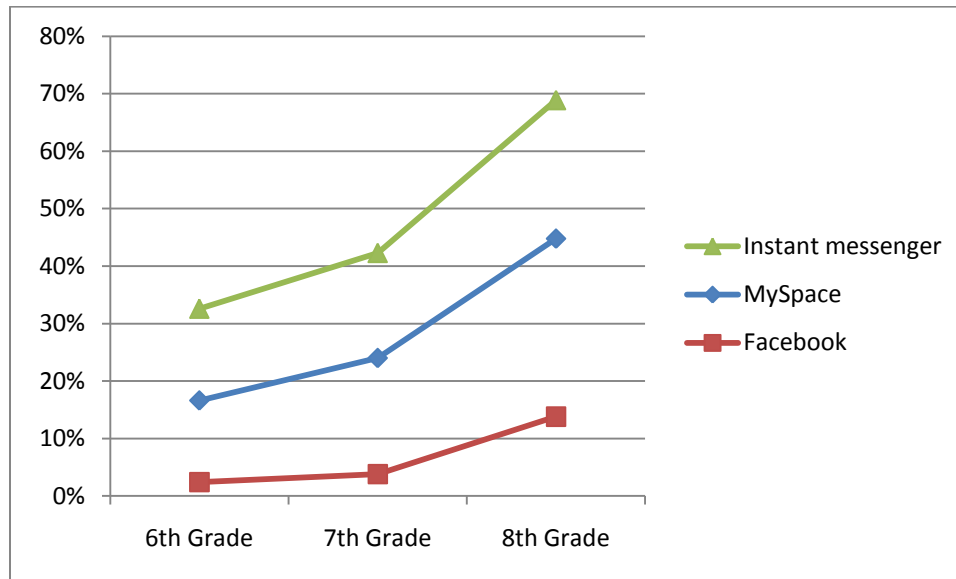
When asked how often parents think their children use the Internet, 46.5 % of 6<sup>th</sup> and 46.2 % of 7<sup>th</sup> grade parents believed their children used the Internet at least once a day. However when 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents responded, almost 80 % believed their children used the Internet at least once a day.

Figure 5. Activities parent's believe their children most often engage in while on the Internet



Upon discussing what activities parents thought their children engaged in while using the Internet; 6<sup>th</sup> grade parents were more likely to assume their children were playing games (83.7 %), or viewing websites for kids (55.8 %). While 7<sup>th</sup> grade parents believed their children were usually doing school work (65.4 %), playing games (65.4 %) or downloading and listening to music (57.7 %). Results from 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents showed a wider range of responses; with parents indicating their children spent most of their time doing school work while online (65.5 %), 58.6 % of parents thought their children spent more time downloading or listening to music, followed closely by 55.2 % of 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents who thought their children engaged in game playing while on the Internet. 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents were also the largest percentage to think that their children were engaging in Instant Messenger (48.3 %) while online and the highest (34.5 %) percentage to believe their children were reading and writing e-mails while online.

Figure 6. Parent's perception their children's social networking use

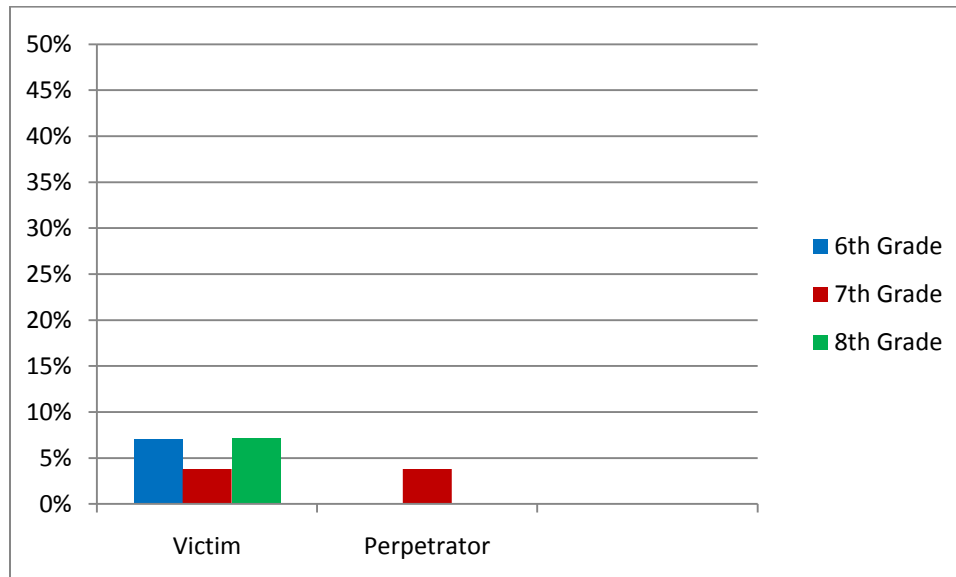


Parents were surveyed based on their knowledge of whether or not their children had a profile account on three of the most popular social networking sites. 6<sup>th</sup> grade parents were the least likely to think that their children had accounts, however 32.6% of 6<sup>th</sup> grade parents agreed that their children had Instant Messenger accounts, followed by 16.6% who believed their children had MySpace pages, while only 2.4% thought their children had Facebook accounts.

7<sup>th</sup> grade parents were mediocre in their responses, 42.3% knew that their children had Instant Messenger accounts, 24% supposed their children had MySpace profiles and 3.8% said their children had a Facebook page.

8<sup>th</sup> grade parents indicated the highest percentage upon answering the question does your child have a profile page? Nearly 70% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents surveyed agreed their child maintained an Instant Messenger account, while 45% of parents assumed their children had a MySpace page and 14% thought their child had a Facebook account.

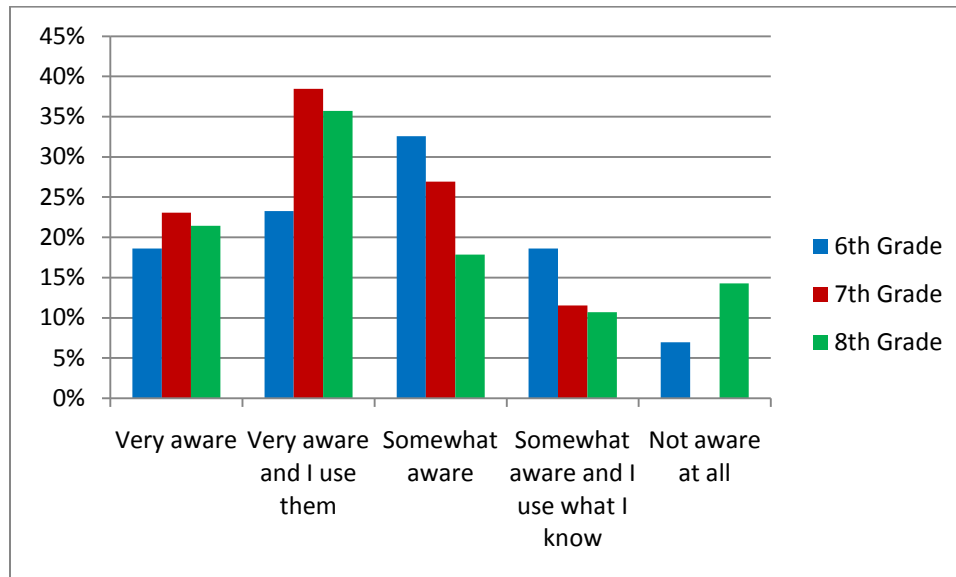
Figure 7. Parent knowledge of child's experience of cyber bullying



When parents were asked if their child had ever been the victim of a cyber bully most parents responded no. Only 7% of 6<sup>th</sup> grade parents believed their child had ever been the victim of a cyber bully, while less than 4% of 7<sup>th</sup> grade parents agreed that their children had been cyber bullied and only 7.1% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents said their child was bullied online.

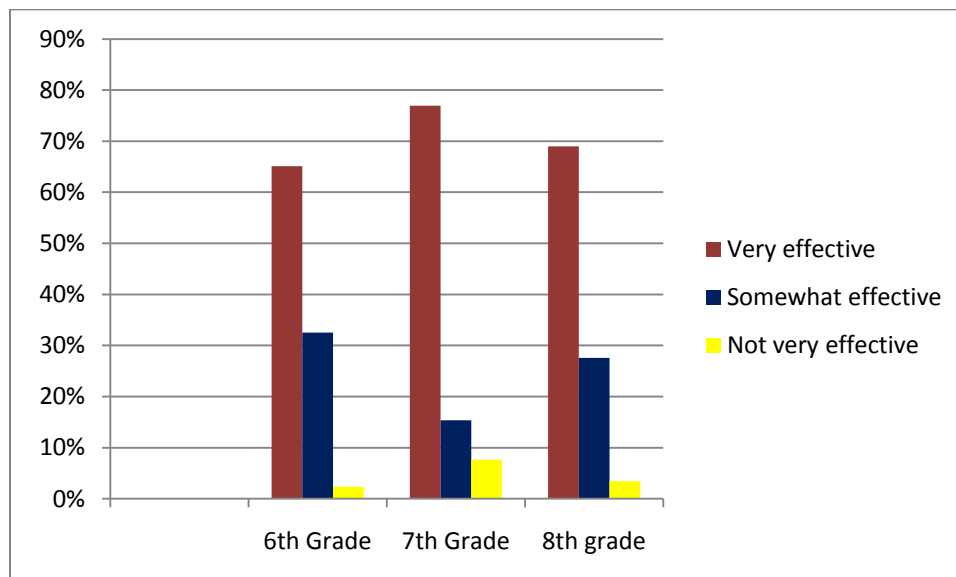
When the same parents were asked if their child had ever cyber bullied someone else while online, the overwhelming majority answered no. 0% of both 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents believed their child had never bullied someone else while online and only 3.8% of 7<sup>th</sup> grade parents agreed their children had experience bullying others on the Internet.

Figure 8. Parental awareness of computer safety strategies that can be used on their computer



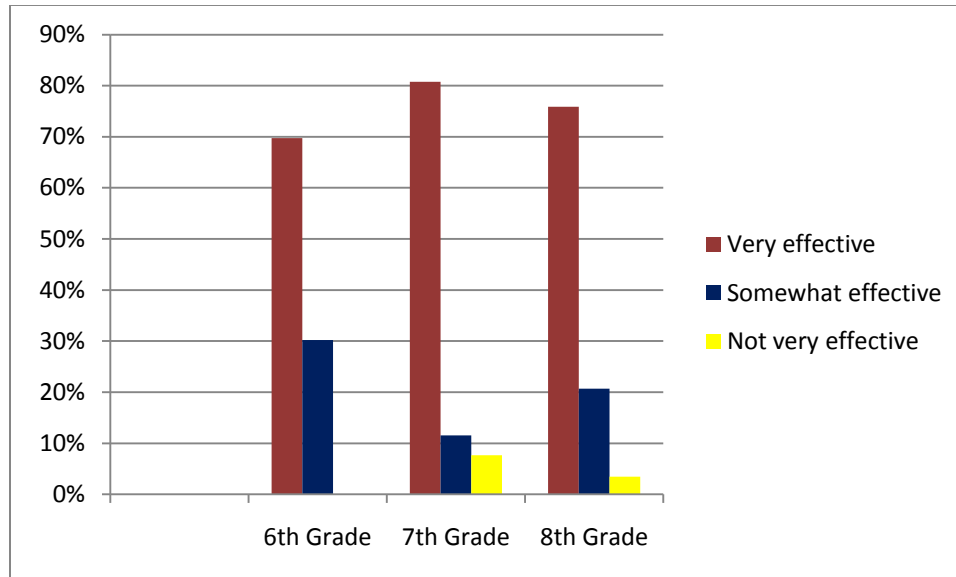
Most parents surveyed were at least somewhat aware of safety strategies that they could use on their home computers, although 7% of 6<sup>th</sup> grade parents and 14% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents admitted to not being aware at all of any safety strategies they could use on their computers.

Figure 9. Parent perception of the effectiveness of an educational program on Internet safety for middle school children



Most 6<sup>th</sup> grade (65.1%), 7<sup>th</sup> grade (76.9%) and 8<sup>th</sup> grade (69%) parents stated that providing their children with an educational program on Internet safety would be an effective strategy for information on Internet safety, Internet rules and cyber bullying.

Figure 10. Parent perception of the effectiveness of educational program on Internet safety for parents



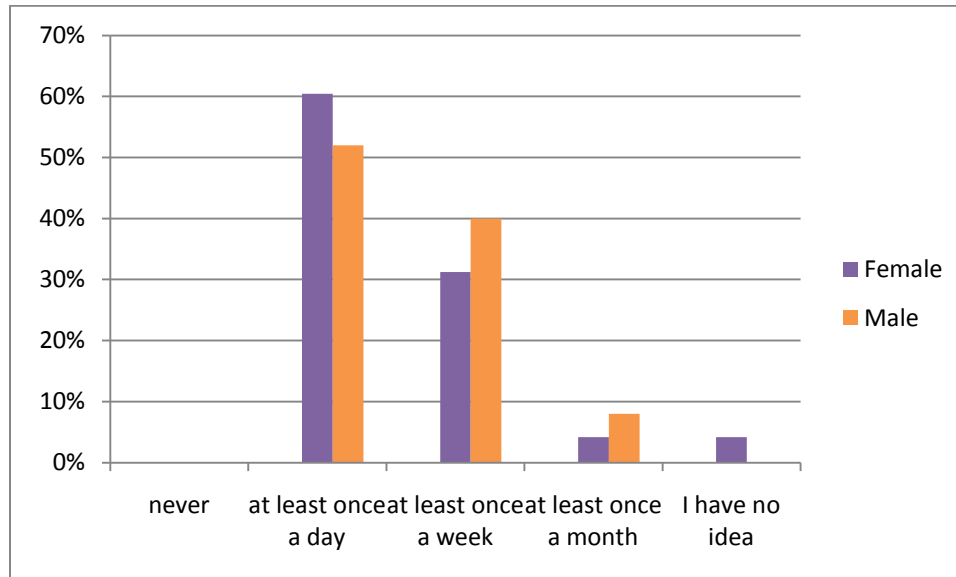
When parents were asked about the effectiveness of an education program aimed towards parents regarding Internet safety, most parents agreed that it would be very effective. Only 7.7% of 7<sup>th</sup> grade parents and 3.4% percent of 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents reported that an educational program would not be very effective for them. All 6<sup>th</sup> grade parents thought a program would be either somewhat or very effective to educate them on Internet safety and rules, as well as cyber bullying online.

#### *Gender Comparisons*

The researcher looked at gender differences among parents who identified their child as being either male or female. Results showed that 20.8% of parents with a female child had

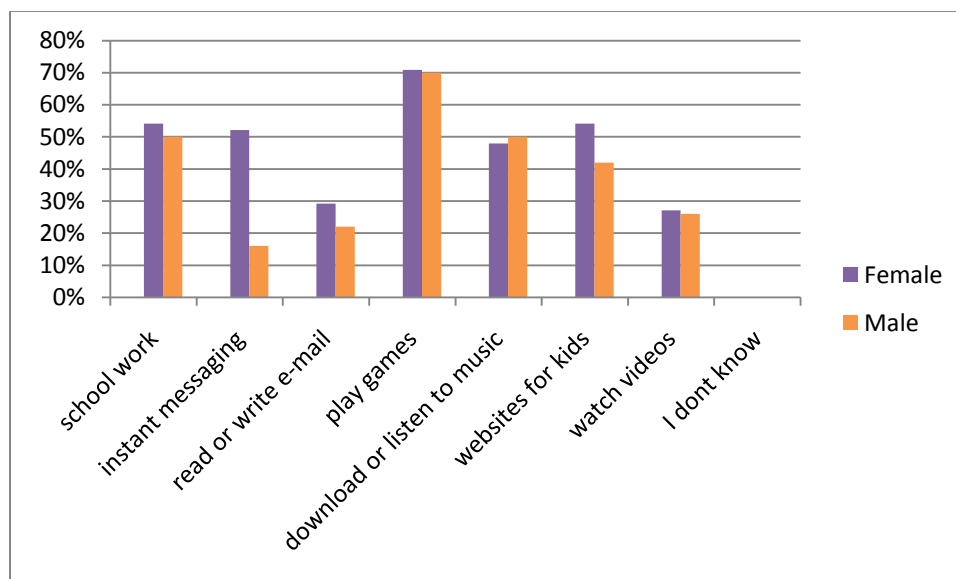
Internet access in their bedrooms, while only 10% of parents of males said their children had Internet access in their rooms.

Figure 11. Parental knowledge of male versus female Internet use among middle school children



Respondents of both genders agreed that their children accessed the Internet at least once a day. 60.4% of parents with female children were slightly higher in stating their child used the Internet at least once a day than parents of male children (52.2%).

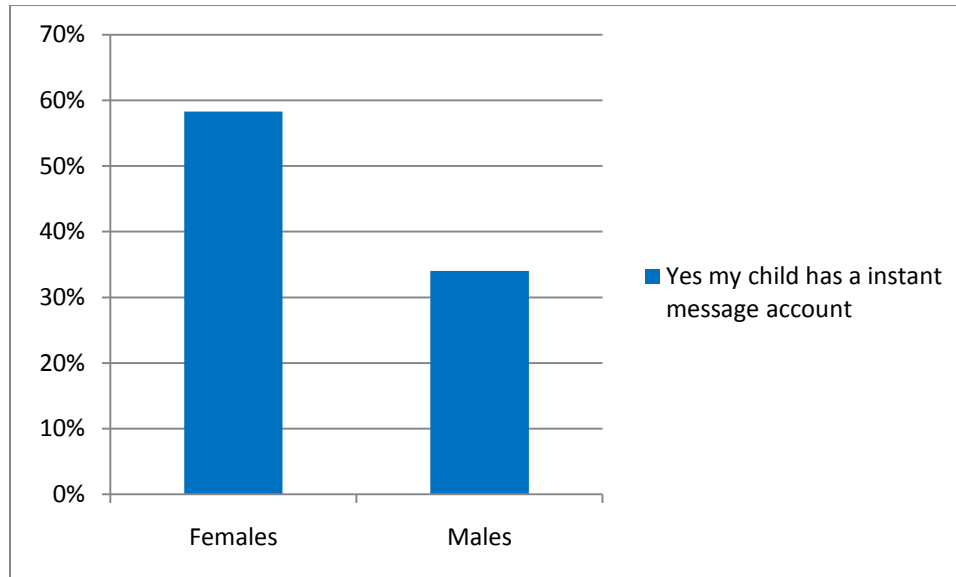
Figure 12. Parent's perception of female versus male children's online activities



No significant difference was found between parents of female and male children and their knowledge of what activities their children engage in online, other than Instant Messenger.

52.1% of parents agreed that their female children spend time online engaging in Instant Message conversations, as compared to 16 % of parents with male children.

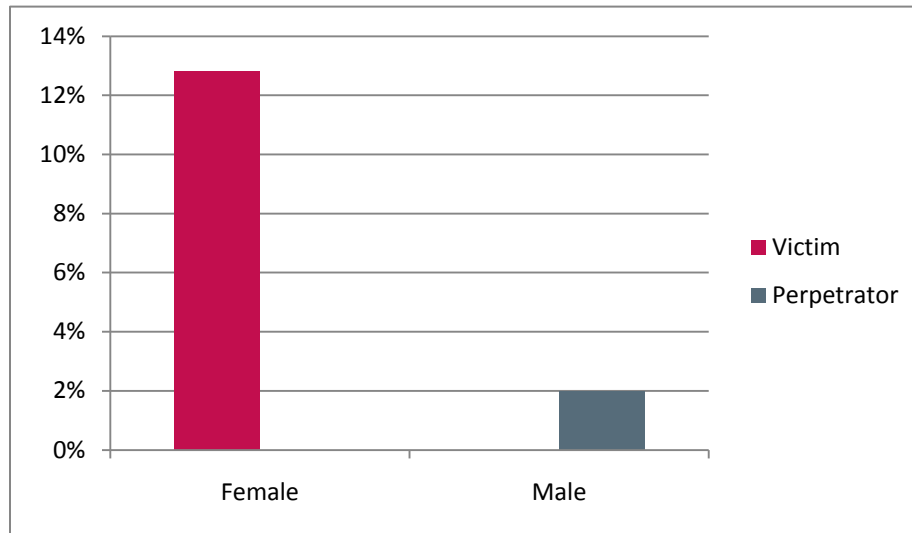
Figure 13. Gender comparison of parent perceptions of Instant Message use



Although no significant difference was found between genders according to parent responses of their children having a MySpace or Facebook page, 58.3 % of respondents with female children versus 34% of those surveyed with male children agreed that their child maintained an Instant Messenger profile.



Figure 14. Gender Comparison of parent perception of cyber bullying



The majority of parents surveyed did not believe their children were either victims or perpetrators of cyber bullying. However among those who answered yes, 12.8% of parents with female children said their child had been a victim of cyber bullying, and 0% said their child had been the perpetrator. Contrary to only 2% of parents with male children who thought their child was the perpetrator and 0% who thought they were a victim.

### Discussion

The purpose of this project was to determine what knowledge parents had of their children Internet use. The research for this project focused on the current issue of cyber bullying, including; the uniqueness of bullying online, current research of cyber bullying, characteristics of cyber bullies, the effects, current prevention programs and finally parental knowledge of cyber bullying and other Internet behaviors.

### *Interpretation of Findings*

The findings of this study indicated there is a lack of parental knowledge in some areas of children's Internet use, including cyber bullying. Parent respondents declared that only 11% of 6

and 7<sup>th</sup> graders and 24% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders have a computer located in their bedrooms. Current literature however has stated that 31% of kids ages 8-18 indicated they have a computer in their bedroom. When gender was taken into account parents of females admitted that 20% had computers located in their bedrooms, as compared to only 10% of males.

The current study also found that 60.8% of parents responded they monitor their children's Internet use all of or almost all of the time, however research has found that adolescents who were surveyed claim their parents monitor their Internet use only about 33% of the time (Pew American and Internet Life Project, 2001). In addition 48% of teens polled stated that their parents know nothing or very little of what they do online, and 22% of teens reported that their parents or guardians have never discussed the Internet with them (Netzsmartz.org) A recent study also confirmed that although 62% of parents indicated that they checked what their children were doing online, only 33% of teens agreed that their parents monitor their online actions (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2001). These data seemed to be contrary to what parents claimed in the current study in terms of monitoring and knowledge of their children Internet activities.

Up to 88% of parents also claimed to be familiar with popular social networking and communication websites such as Instant Messenger, Facebook and MySpace, however a recent study found that 42% of parents do not review the content of what their teenager reads or types in chat rooms or Instant Messaging and were found to not know the meanings of some of the most commonly used Instant Message phrases. 57% did not know LOL (Laughing Out Loud), 68% did not know BRB (Be Right Back), and 92% did not know A/S/L (Age/Sex/Location). The same study also found that 95% of parents could not identify common chat room lingo that

teenagers use to warn people they are chatting with their parents are watching, like POS; Parent Over Shoulder and P911; Parent Alert (Missingkids.com).

Parent's in this study declared that 34% of their children have an Instant Messenger account however this is contradictory to research that confirmed nearly 70% of 10 to 17 year olds have an Instant Messenger accounts (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007). The same results were found when parents were asked of their children's use of social networking sites; 16% of parents agreed their children had profile accounts, while research showed that over 61% of youths 12 to 17 use social networking sites (Netsmartz.org). One parent whose child did use MySpace stated; "All parents should monitor their children Internet access and discuss the dangers of cyber predators. My children are told not to accept any "friends" on MySpace or IM if they don't know them." However this research still seemed to demonstrate that most parents are not as aware of what their children are doing online as they perceive themselves to be.

Upon discussing Internet safety strategies 51% of parents answered that they were very aware of safety strategies, but only 30% stated they use safety strategies for their children's online activities. This finding is consistent with previous research in which over half (51%) of parents admitted they do not have or do not know if they have software on their computer that monitors where their teenager go online and with whom they interact (Netsmartz.org). Although over 50% of parent's agreed that they were very aware of computer safety strategies, 70% of parents said that an educational program would still be very effective for them.

This result may be interpreted in that although parents would like to think that they are well versed in safety processions for their child, they still believe they can learn more. This is illustrated in a response from the following parent; "I would love to sit in a class, I am sure there is much I do not know. I think it is very important for students to be aware that colleges and

employers check out MySpace and Facebook. It does not always have to be negative but they need to be careful. My daughter argues to get a MySpace and is under the impression that if she puts it under private she is perfectly safe from other people interacting with her. Is this true? If not I would love to see that issue cleared up. Thanks”

However another response from a parent indicates this particular parent’s lack of understanding in terms of education; “To give educational programs to middle school children would simply give kids ideas where they might have not even thought of the possibilities for using the Internet for evil. A program for parents would be just like preaching to the choir.” It is in the opinion of this researcher that for parents and educators to simply hope that children will not find out ways to use the Internet in dangerous ways and for those children not to be educated in how to protect themselves is simply neglectful. In response to the current research it seems inevitable that the majority of children will use the Internet, and some in ways that are not safe or appropriate. It then becomes the responsibility of the community to ensure that our children are educated of the risks that are associated with using the Internet.

For some parents there seems to be a gap in terms of knowledge regarding the newest technological communication devices. Many parents have admitted what they do know they have learned from their children (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). In future society it seems fair to state that technology will be an essential part of the community and if parents refuse to educate themselves and catch up that gap will continue to grow. Children will continue to explore and learn new ways to use not only the Internet but the newest devices and parents will be left in the dark. This is reiterated as one parent agreed; “I have profile accounts so I can keep an eye on my oldest son, however I hate to say it but given my experience with my oldest son, most parents haven't a clue what their children are doing online and don't want to know.”

### *Cyber bullying*

The outcome of this project demonstrated that parents do not believe their children engage in cyber bullying as neither a victim nor a perpetrator. Only 6% of parents agreed that their child had been a victim of cyber bullying, while 1% answered that their child could have been a cyber bully. Past research has shown a much different picture in terms of the prevalence rate of cyber bullying among children and adolescents. As stated previously research varies, however studies have claimed that as high as 60% of youth have engaged in cyber bullying at least once. One parent did agree stating “My oldest daughter was almost a sexual victim from someone a friend introduced to her that she met on the Internet. I think it is very important for parents and teens to be educated in Internet safety” However most parents in this study argued that although most did not believe their children were involved in cyber bullying, those who did stated they were victims more often than perpetrators. Zero percent 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents and only 3.8% of 7<sup>th</sup> grade parents would admit that their children could have bullied someone else while on the Internet. However 7% of 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents and 4% of 7<sup>th</sup> grade parents seemed to think their child could have been a victim of cyber bullying in the past.

This outcome may be related to research that has acknowledged when cyber bullying does occur children are not likely to tell their parents, usually because they are afraid of getting computer privileges taken away (Kowalski & Limber, 2008). In a middle school focus group when asked why their friends did not tell an adult upon being bullied or harassed online students responded in the following ways; “She was afraid if she told her parents she would get restricted, so she did not want to let them know” “They might be scared to tell their parents, because their parents might say, ‘I told you so, I told you not to use that blog. (Kowalski & Limber, 2008 p.

92). Children and adolescents are keeping these incidents hidden from adults in their lives for fear of losing their most important means of communication.

In some cases it is also plausible that developmentally children in middle school are at an age where they begin to explore elements of their lives through their peers, keeping parents in the dark. Socially children and teens want to feel accepted by others and feel as though they belong, sometimes even if that includes accepting bullying incidents. According to the Social Identity Theory adolescents will identify themselves based on how others perceive them (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). If they are being bullied, harassed or picked children may perceive themselves as not acceptable and have feelings of inferiority or embarrassment that they may not want their parents to know about. Reporting cyber bullying to parents may result in repercussions that in the eyes of the child, would make their acceptance even less tolerated by their peers.

This outcome could also be simply that parent's do not want to think of their children as bullies. Without concrete knowledge parents may assume that their children are not capable of being considered a perpetrator of harassment or bullying. This also relates to the type of bully that research has shown is typically responsible of cyber bullying. Most researchers agree that cyber bullies tend to be more sophisticated, covert, undercover bullies, Willard, (2007a) described these as "social climber bullies." Characteristically these students are known to adults as school leader, involved in sports, academically successful and over all popular students (Burgess-Proctor et al.; 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Willard, 2007a; Ybarra, Diener-West & Leaf, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007. Parents of these types of bullies may have no reason to think their child would be participating in online bullying.

In terms of gender, of those parents who agreed that their child had experienced cyber bullying, 13% of parents of female children stated their child had been a victim, however none

would admit that their child could be a perpetrator. While discussing male children parents believed that none of their male children had been victims of cyber bullying and only 2% had cyber bullied someone else. However research has shown that females may be more likely to cyber bully than males (Kowlaski & Limber, 2007; Oterman 1992, Willard 2007a) Literature has shown that females tend to bully differently than males (Adams, 2001; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Willard, 2007a). Female bullies generally bully through more indirect forms of relational aggression (Oterman, 1992). The Internet gives females an opportunity to use social manipulation, and humiliation to attack their victims without being personally involved (Bearson, Bearson & Ferron, 2003).

It can be interpreted from the research that parents are not fully aware of what their children's online activities. Recent media attention, along with previous research has shown us that the Internet can be a dangerous place and parents are just beginning to realize the repercussions that not being involved may have.

### *Limitations*

Although from the study one can infer that parental knowledge of Internet use and abuse, including cyber bullying among middle school children is not consistent to providing adequate preventive and safety precautions, there were limitations to this study. First of all it is possible that students who have parents living at separate addresses, that both receive district mail, including interim reports, may have each gotten a survey regarding their child's Internet use. It is possible that each parent filled out the survey in regards to the same child and returned it to school, giving multiple results for the same child, yet under different parental supervisions.

A second limitation was the sample size. In order to generalize results a larger sample size would have been preferred. A total of 760 surveys were sent out and 98 were returned, giving a response rate of 13%.

The instrument used for the project was created by the researcher because no survey existed that measured parental knowledge of children's Internet use. Thus the reliability and validity of the survey is questionable. The results may have held more weight if the survey's reliability and validity could have been tested before distribution to ensure accurate results.

### *Implications for Counseling Practice*

This study provides a foundational basis of parent knowledge in regards to their middle school children's use of the Internet, specifically online aggression, harassment and violence, termed as cyber bullying. Results have indicated that parents may not have a clear understanding of what their children are doing while on the Internet. Furthermore it is unclear as to whether parents are aware of the dangers of cyber bullying, Internet harassment, or online predators. This study informs counselors, educators and parents of not only the dangers of the Internet but the importance of an educational program for prevention. Almost 70% of parents agreed that an educational program on Internet safety would be effective for their middle school child, while 75% agreed a program would be effective for parents and caregivers. Educational programs for parents should outline cyber bullying, harassment and other risky online behavior, as well as the prevalence and effects of such behaviors. An educational program or a parent outreach program (appendix C; Willard 2007a) should teach parents the specific methods in which these behaviors can occur, such as MySpace, Instant Messenger, or e-mail. How to create a parent child Internet contract (appendix D; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008), teaching parents terms for understanding



Internet use and cyber bullying (appendix E; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008) and tips on how parents can talk to their children about Internet safety (appendix F; Missingkids.org).

In addition to an educational program for parents, children and adolescents should also have a guide to Internet safety. Children and adolescent should be made aware of what cyber bullying is and in what methods it can occur. Young people should also understand how to prevent and report suspicious behavior. It is important that adolescents understand what it means to be a cyber bully. The anonymity of bullying online can often prevent children from understanding the full effect of their actions. Connecting children to the emotional reaction of their choices is important in personalizing the Internet relationship and helping adolescents understand the weight of their actions.

Another important aspect is how school districts should handle cyber bullying cases and to what responsibility it is that schools educate students about the dangers of the Internet, including cyber bullying, and harassment. All schools should have an Internet policy that clearly established regulations for students and staff in regards to Internet use. In addition preventative programs should be implemented, including education for students. Preventative factors should include influencing student attitudes about how to use the Internet appropriately and when and how to involve adults if necessary.

### *Future Research*

In order to better understand cyber bullying, future research is imperative. More extensive research involving parents and caregivers would identify how to provide prevention and education. A study of parents who are found to be very involved in their children's online activities and the impact that has on their abuse of the Internet, including experiences with cyber bullying would provide more insight into parental participation and its outcome on children's

Internet use. An aspect that seemed to be missing in the research studied was that of ethnicity. Although briefly discussed in this review and more thorough look at who cyber bullies and why would be beneficial in understanding how to better reach victims as well perpetrators. Current research seemed to generalize that cyber bullying is mostly an upper class, Caucasian issue. More research into these concerns would allow educators to better equip themselves in prevention strategies. This generalization also alludes to socioeconomic issues that can be more fully explored. Researchers must ask in what economic class cyber bullying occurs, which would give a better understanding in how to prevent future occurrences.

A future study on the characteristic of youth Internet users may give researchers an awareness of who has access to online activities and for what reasons they are being abused. Although the effects of cyber bullying are discussed a longitudinal study would provide more insight into the specific repercussions of cyber bullying actions. Since cyber bullying is such a new issue a study looking at the effects of cyber bullying as adults may provide help to identify a stronger case in prevention. Cyber bullying must also be looked at as a side effect of traditional bullying, a more extensive study on the similarities and differences of bullying online and traditional bullying would help researchers better understand and identify future cyber bullies and strategies to prevent and react to cyber bullying incidents.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to provide a foundational basis for research associated with middle school children's use and abuse of the Internet, specifically online aggression and violence, termed as cyber bullying. The researcher has found that parental knowledge of this phenomenon seemed to be either very limited or nearly absent. Most research discussed the prevalence of cyber bullying; who and what a cyber bully was but left out parents entirely. The

researcher asked if parents are even aware of this new type of bullying, if not what should they know and how do they protect and educate their children? Results indicated that parental knowledge of this issue was not sufficient in understanding the seriousness and prevalence of online aggression and violence. Educational programs for educators, parents and students are necessary to allow for further understanding of the issues, as well as the creation of preventative strategies. It is clear that the use and abuse of the Internet, including cyber bullying among young people demands more attention and further research must be implemented to ensure future understanding and prevention.

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## Appendix A

Dear Parents/ Legal Guardians

My name is Na'Lisa Rowe and I am an intern in the counseling office at East Irondequoit Middle school. As part of my master's thesis I am conducting a study on parental knowledge and concern of middle school cyber bullying. Bullying is defined as repeated aggressive behavior in which there is an imbalance of power. Cyber bullying is a form of bullying or harassment that occurs over the internet, typically through instant messenger, e-mail, or by accessing profile pages.

This is a survey for parents including 22 questions that will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The answers to this survey are important because it will allow the investigator to assess parental knowledge and concerns about their children's use and abuse of the internet. Information gathered will be used to inform you as well as students, and school staff about the prevalence of cyber bullying among middle school students.

You are being asked to participate in this study and your answers to the attached survey signify your consent to participate. **Please do not write your name on the survey.** There will be no way in which your responses can be connected to this survey, and results will be reported in aggregate form only. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer, and you may stop participating in the survey at any time. It is hoped that approximately 300 people will participate in the study. The results will be used to address possible concerns of parents about cyber bullying and other internet safety issues, to eventually implement a preventative strategies program at the East Irondequoit School District.

Thank you for your participation in the survey. You may return the completed survey by enclosing the survey in the included envelope and send it with your child back to school. Your child can drop off the survey in the LARGE RED BOX labeled "SURVEYS" located at the security desk and in the counseling office.

If you have any questions regarding this study you may contact:

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## Appendix B

**USE AND ABUSE OF THE INTERNET AMONG MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILDREN**  
**PARENT SURVEY**  
**EAST IRONDEQUOIT MIDDLE SCHOOL**

1. What is the grade level of your child?  
☐ 6<sup>th</sup> grade    ☐ 7<sup>th</sup> grade    ☐ 8<sup>th</sup> grade
2. What is the sex of your child?  
☐ Male    ☐ Female
3. Do you have a computer with access to the internet in your home?  
☐ YES    ☐ NO
4. Does your child have a computer with Internet access in their bedroom?  
☐ YES    ☐ NO
5. Where would you say your child has the most access to a computer with the Internet?  
☐ at home    ☐ at a friend's house    ☐ at school    ☐ I'm not sure  
☐ Other – Please Specify \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
6. How often does your child use the Internet?  
☐ Never    ☐ at least once a day    ☐ at least once a week  
☐ at least once a month    ☐ I have no idea
7. Do you set a time limit on your child's internet use?  
☐ YES    ☐ NO    ☐ My child does not have a computer
8. If your child uses a home computer to access the internet, how closely would you say that you monitor your child's online activities?  
☐ Not at all    ☐ Sometimes    ☐ Almost all of the time    ☐ Always    ☐ We do not have a home computer
9. What activities does your child most often engage in when on the internet?  
☐ School work    ☐ Instant messaging    ☐ e-mail    ☐ games    ☐ download or listen to music  
☐ Watch videos    ☐ websites for kids    ☐ I don't know    ☐ other: Please Specify: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
10. Are you familiar with MySpace?  
☐ YES    ☐ NO
11. Are you familiar with Facebook?  
☐ YES    ☐ NO

12. Are you familiar with AIM ( Instant Messenger)?

☐ YES ☐ NO

13. Do you know if your child has a MySpace profile account?

☐ Yes my child has a profile account ☐ Yes my child has a profile account AND I have the passwords  
☐ No my child does not have a profile account ☐ I do not know if my child has a profile account

14. Do you know if your child has a Facebook profile account?

☐ Yes my child has a profile account ☐ Yes my child has a profile account AND I have the passwords  
☐ No my child does not have a profile account ☐ I do not know if my child has a profile account

15. Do you know if your child has an AIM (Instant Messenger) account?

☐ Yes my child has a profile account ☐ Yes my child has a profile account AND I have the passwords  
☐ No my child does not have a profile account ☐ I do not know if my child has a profile account

16. To your knowledge has your child ever been the victim of cyber bullying?

☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ I do not know

17. To your knowledge has your child ever cyber bullied someone else?

☐ YES ☐ NO ☐ I do not know

18. How aware are you of safety strategies that can be used on your computer?

☐ Very aware ☐ Very aware and I use them ☐ Somewhat aware ☐ Somewhat aware and I use what I know  
☐ Not aware at all

19. How effective do you think an educational program for middle school students would be on Internet safety (Information security, Internet rules, Cyber bullying)?

☐ Very effective ☐ Somewhat effective ☐ Not very effective

20. How effective do you think an educational program for PARENTS would be on Internet safety (Information security, Internet rules, Cyber bullying)?

☐ Very effective ☐ Somewhat effective ☐ Not very effective

Other information I would like to know or experiences I would like to share \_\_\_\_\_

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THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY



Appendix C

PARENT OUTREACH

Objectives	Rationale	Action Steps	Responsibility	Timeline	Costs	Assessment
Parents will gain sufficient understanding of the issues to enable them to provide guidance to their children on:	It is essential to enlist the assistance of parents to address these concerns because much of youth online activity occurs at home.	The district will post information for parents on the district Web site.	SS committee School leaders	Implemented during school year and continuing thereafter.	To be determined	Parent "economy" (e.g., PTA leadership) requested to solicit input from other parents and report on the perceived effectiveness of the information dissemination.
• Appropriate standards for online communications.	Many parents are not providing sufficient guidance to their children or monitoring their online activities.	Schools will offer a workshop on Internet safety and responsible use issues to parents.				Parents who attend a parent workshop will be requested to complete an evaluation after the workshop.
• Effective strategies to respond to cyberbullying and other online risk situations.	Providing parent education is difficult; therefore, many different approaches are necessary.	Schools will provide in-depth information to parents at school.				Parents of children who have become involved in risky online situations and who receive informational material will be requested to provide an evaluation regarding the usefulness of the material.
• Concerns about posting material that could be viewed as a threat and the importance of reporting any possible threats or situations involving cyberbullying to appropriate adults.	The community outreach program will provide an additional approach to parent outreach.	The community outreach program will provide in-depth information to any parents whose children have become involved in a risky online situation.				
• How to more effectively monitor their child's online activities and detect and respond to concerns.	Protecting Factor Increasing parental involvement will reduce OJ/CJ concerns and improve responsiveness to specific incidents to reduce harm to students.					

## Appendix D

## Parent/Child Internet Use Contract

### Child Expectations

I understand that using the family computer is a privilege that is subject to the following rules:

1. I will respect the privacy of others who use this computer. I will not open, move, or delete files that are not in my personal directory.
2. I understand that mom and dad may access and look at my files at any time.
3. I will not download anything or install programs without first asking mom or dad.
4. I will never give out private information while online. At no time will I ever give out my last name, phone number, address, or school name – even if I know the person with whom I am communicating.  
My screen name will be: \_\_\_\_\_
5. I understand that I can use the computer for approved purposes only.
6. I will never write or post anything online that I would not want mom or dad to see. I will not use profanity or otherwise offensive language. If I receive messages or view content with offensive language, I will report it to mom and dad immediately.
7. I will never agree to meet an online friend in person without first asking mom or dad. Dangerous people may try to trick me into meeting up with them.
8. If I ever feel uncomfortable about an experience online, I will immediately tell mom or dad. I understand that mom and dad are willing to help me and will not punish me as long as these rules are followed.

### Parent Expectations

I understand that it is my responsibility to protect my family and to help them receive the best of what the Internet has to offer. In that spirit, I agree to the following:

1. I will listen calmly. If my child comes to me with a problem related to his or her online experiences, I promise not to get angry but to do my best to help my child resolve the situation in which they find themselves.
2. I will be reasonable. I will set reasonable rules and expectations for Internet usage. I will establish reasonable consequences for lapses in judgment on the part of my child.
3. I will treat my child with dignity. I will respect the friendships that he or she may make online as I would his or her offline friends.
4. I will not unnecessarily invade my child's privacy. I promise not to go further than I need to in order to ensure my child's safety. I will not read diaries or journals, nor will I inspect emails or computer files unless there is a serious concern.
5. I will not take drastic measures. No matter what happens, I understand that the Internet is an important tool that is essential to my child's success in school or business, and I promise not to ban it entirely.
6. I will be involved. I will spend time with my child and be a positive part of his or her online activities and relationships – just as I am offline.

We understand the above rules and agree to use the computer accordingly.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Child

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

After signing, post visibly by the computer.

## Appendix E

www.cyberbullying.us

# GLOSSARY

## Cyberbullying Terms

By Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D. and Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D.

**Anonymizer** – this refers to an intermediary which hides or disguises the IP address associated with the Internet user. Generally, this allows a person to engage in various Internet activities without leaving an easily-trackable digital footprint.

**Bash Board** – an online bulletin board on which individuals can post anything they want. Generally, posts are malicious and hateful statements directed against another person.

**Blocking** – the denial of access to particular parts of the Internet. Usually a message will be shown on screen to say that access has been denied.

**Blog** – interactive web journal or diary, the contents of which are posted online and then viewable by some or all individuals. The act of updating a blog is called "blogging". A person who keeps a blog is called a "blogger". Evolved from "web blog."

**Buddy List** – a collection of names or handles which represent friends or "buddies" within an instant messaging or chat program. They are useful in informing a person when his/her friends are online and available to chat.

**Bullying** – "longstanding violence," physical or psychological. Aggressive behavior or intentional "harm doing" by one person or a group, generally carried out repeatedly and over time, and which involves a power differential. Malicious aggressors who seek implicit or explicit pleasure or profit through the mistreatment of another. Harmful behavior of a repetitive nature. Happens when someone hurts or scares another person on purpose and the victim has a hard time defending him or herself.

**Cellular phone** – a device which allows for telephone communications without being tethered to one specific place.

**Chat** – an online conversation, typically carried out by people who use nicknames instead of their real names. You can read messages from others in the chat room and type in and send your own message reply.

**Chat room** – a virtual room online where groups of people send and receive messages on screen. Popular chat rooms can have hundreds of people all participating at the same time. What you type appears instantly as a real time conversation. All of the people taking place are listed on the right hand side of the screen with their nicknames or screen names.

**Computer** – an electronic device that stores and processes information, and also facilitates electronic communication when connected to a network.

**Cyberbullycide** – suicide stemming directly or indirectly from cyberbullying victimization.

**Cyberbullying** – willful or repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text. Generally, the offender has perceived or actual power over the victim(s). Also known as "online bullying" or "electronic bullying."

**Cyberspace** – a term used to describe the electronic universe created by computer networks in which individuals interact.

**Cyberstalking** – harassment that includes threats of harm or is highly intimidating and intruding upon one's personal privacy.

**Cyberthreats** – electronic material that either generally or specifically raises concerns that the creator may intend to inflict harm or violence to other or self.

**Digital footprint** – evidence of a person's use of the Internet. This includes anything that can be linked to his or her existence, presence, or identity.

**Email** – electronic mail. Allows Internet users to send and receive electronic text to and from other Internet users.

**Facebook** – the second-most popular social networking web site, with over 60 million active users. Users create personal “profiles” to represent themselves, listing interests and posting photos and communicating with others through private or public messages.

**Filtering** – the applying of a set of criteria against which Internet content is judged acceptable or not. For example, a filter might check the text on a web page with a list of forbidden words. If a match is found, that web page may be blocked or reported through a monitoring process. Generally speaking, it lets data pass or not pass based on previously specified rules.

**Flaming** – sending angry, rude, or obscene messages directed at a person or persons privately or an online group. A “flamewar” erupts when “flames” are sent back and forth.

**Friending** – the act of requesting another person to be your friend (and thereby formally connect with you) on a particular social networking web site (like MySpace or Facebook).

**Gaming** – refers to participation in online games. It often involves individuals adopting roles of fictional characters, thereby directing the outcome of the game.

**Happy Slapping** – an extreme form of bullying where physical assaults are recorded on mobile phones and distributed to others.

**Harassment** – unsolicited words or actions intended to annoy, alarm, or abuse another individual.

**Instant Messaging** – the act of real-time communication between two or more people over a network such as the Internet. This can occur through software such as AOL Instant Messenger, Microsoft Instant Messenger, or Google Talk. This can also occur while logged into social networking web sites or via cellular phone.

**Internet** – A worldwide network of computers communicating with each other via phone lines, satellite links, wireless networks, and cable systems.

**IP Address** – stands for “Internet Protocol” address. It is a unique address assigned to a computing device that allows it to send and receive data with other computing devices that have their own unique addresses.

**IRC** – Internet Relay Chat, a network over which real time conversations take place among two or more people in a “channel” devoted to a specific area of interest.

**ISP** – Internet Service Provider, the company that provides an Internet connection to individuals or companies. Can help with identifying the individual who posts or sends harassing or threatening words.

**Monitoring** – the recording and reporting of online activity through software. It may record a history of all Internet use or just of inappropriate use. A person can also serve this function.

**MySpace** – the most popular social networking web site, with over 300 million accounts created. It allows individuals to create an online representation or “profile” of themselves to include biographical information, personal diary entries, affiliations, likes and dislikes, interests, and multi-media artifacts (pictures, video, and audio). Blogging, messaging, commenting, and “friending” are the primary methods of interacting with others.

**Network** – two or more computers connected so that they can communicate with each other.

**Offender** – the one who instigates online social cruelty. Also known as the “aggressor.”

**Profile** – when considered in the context of online social networking, this is a user-created web page – the design of which can be customized – where a person’s background, interests, friends are listed to reflect who they are, or how they would like to be seen. Streaming music, video, and digital pictures are often included as well.

**SMS** – Short Message Service – a communications protocol that allows short (160 characters or less) text messages over cellular phone.

**Social networking web sites** - online service that bring together people by organizing them around a common interest and by providing an interactive environment of photos, blogs, user profiles, and messaging systems. Examples include "Facebook" and "MySpace."

**Spam** - unsolicited electronic mail sent from someone you do not know

**Texting** - sending an inputted message via cellular phone.

**Trolling** - deliberately but disingenuously posting information to entice genuinely helpful people to respond (often emotionally). Often done to inflame or provoke others.

**Victim** - the one who is on the receiving end of online social cruelty. Also known as the "target."

**Wireless** - communications in which electromagnetic waves carry a signal through space, rather than along a wire.

**Wireless Device** - cellular phones, personal digital assistants, handheld PCs, even computers -- that can access the Internet without being physically attached to a cable or data line.

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For more information, visit <http://www.cyberbullying.us> © 2008 Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin

## Appendix F

### Tips for Parents to Help Keep Their Children Safe Online

- Keep your computer in a common area of your home, such as the family room
- Monitor your child's Internet habits and ask them to show you Web sites they visit
- Talk to your child about cyber ethics. Remind them that bullying, cheating and illegally downloading music, movies and software is wrong. Stress Internet 'stranger danger'
- Develop an 'Internet usage contract' for your child and sign it
- Review your child's Instant Messenger profiles and away messages, in addition to their social networking profiles on sites such as Facebook and MySpace. Periodically take a look at the profiles of their friends as well
- Set time limits on Internet usage
- Know your child's friends—both offline, and online
- Do a 'Google' search for your child's name to ensure that their personal information and photo is not easily searchable on the Internet



